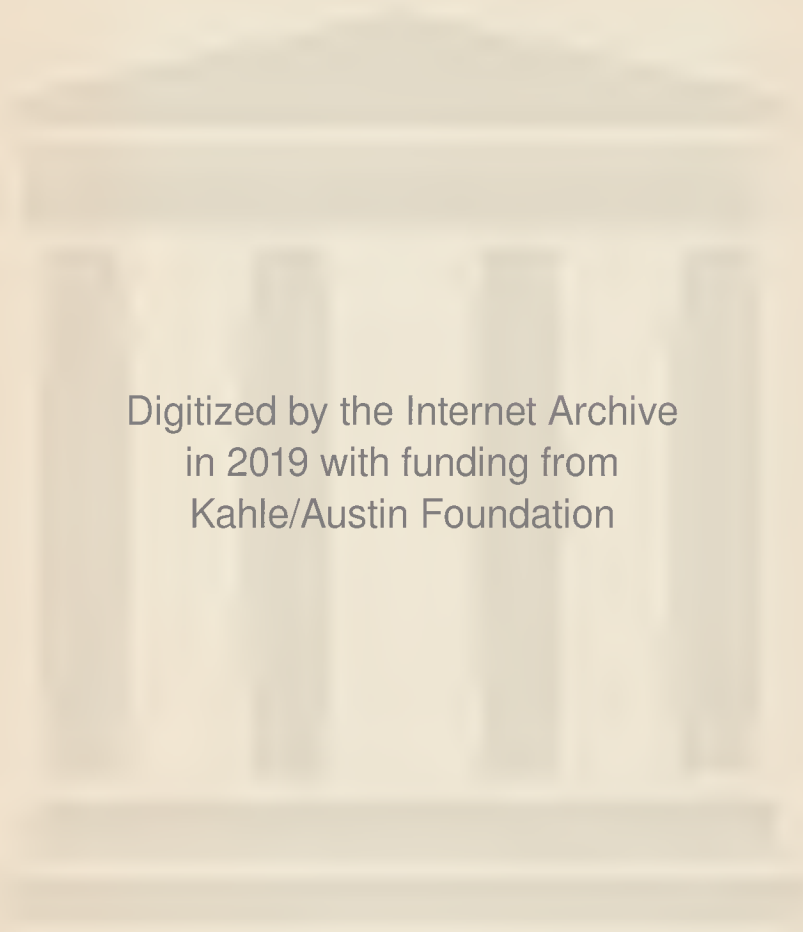


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THE BOOK OF SONNET SEQUENCES

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THE BOOK OF SONNET SEQUENCES

EDITED BY

HOUSTON PETERSON

Author of "Havelock Ellis: Philosopher of Love."



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PETERSON
SONNET SEQUENCES

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To My Father
N. H. PETERSON

89814

PREFACE

COMPACT, conventional, rigid in appearance, the sonnet has been, for six centuries, a miraculous wine-press through which the richest, the quintessential elements of the human spirit have been strained. It is the unique mode for achieving brevity, beauty and power together — like a kind of wing, suited to short but splendid flight. It seems to be a natural pattern, corresponding to some fundamental process of the mind, “when emotion is either too deeply charged with thought, or too much adulterated with fancy, to pass spontaneously into the movements of the lyric.” It flourishes in the greatest periods of poetry and makes a special appeal to nearly all great poets.

The original rules of the sonnet were extremely strict, but they have been varied or violated so often and so successfully in English that now some four or five forms can be recognized. At least, a sonnet should be confined to a single thought, feeling, or mood; and to fourteen decasyllabic lines, following a definite rhyme scheme. Yet the “caudated” or “mock sonnets” of Meredith’s *Modern Love* are in sixteen lines.

In the present period of literary anarchy, of æsthetic radicalism, the sonnet has more than held its own in the fine achievements of such different poets as John Masefield, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Rupert Brooke, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Edgar Lee Masters, George Sterling, Arthur Davison Ficke, W. W. Gibson, and Elinor Wylie. Fiery leaders in the free verse movement of ten years ago are now turning to the traditional quatorzain. And David Morton even shows that in the twentieth century new values are being given to the sonnet in the way of informality, intimacy, character portraiture, and singing lyricism.

Sequences of sonnets developed in Italy in the thirteenth century almost as early as the sonnet itself. The *Vita Nuova* of Dante, "the earliest sonneteer of historical importance," is essentially a series of sonnets interspersed with prose commentary; and Petrarch's enormous influence resulted from his three hundred and seventeen sonnets "To Laura in Life" and "To Laura in Death." To Petrarch must be traced the three hundred thousand sonnets estimated to have been written in western Europe during the sixteen hundreds. After Wyatt and Surrey introduced the form into England around 1530-40 (their efforts were not actually published until 1557) it was taken up independently by three young men, Edmund Spenser, Thomas Watson, and Sir Philip Sidney. Spenser at first merely translated some French sonnets of DuBellay and Marot; his famous *Amoretti* were written during his courtship some fifteen years later. Watson turned out a highly Petrarchan sequence, *The Passionate Century of Love*, a hundred separate poems of which few are regular sonnets; it was published in 1582 and seems to have begun the Elizabethan vogue for sonnets. Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, composed 1580-83, circulated privately for some years and caused great interest when published in 1591. As a far more original achievement than Watson's, with a much closer observation of sonnet requirements, *Astrophel and Stella* may be rightly considered the first sonnet sequence in English. And except for Shakespeare, all of Sidney's distinguished successors such as Spenser, Drayton, Daniel, and Fletcher were truer to Petrarch than they were to themselves. Although their sequences invariably centered around some adored Delia or Zepheria, the thread of connection between the individual units was exceedingly tenuous. Milton, unsurpassed as a writer of single sonnets, ignored the sequence entirely and it was only revived by Wordsworth early in the nineteenth century.

There has been little effort to define the sonnet sequence.

Most literally, it is a story told, step by step, in sonnet stanzas, such as Leonard's *Two Lives* or Blunt's *Esther*; or a poetic commentary on a story told indirectly, by implication, as Meredith's *Modern Love* or even Shakespeare's sonnets. Such a narration, with all superfluous matter cut away, might be called a naked novel. *Modern Love* is a work of astounding concentration, eight hundred chiselled lines balancing the five hundred pages of *Richard Feverel* or *The Egoist*. There is also the sonnet sequence which is a series of variations on a theme, as Rupert Brooke's "1914," Donne's *Holy Sonnets*, David Gray's *In the Shadows*, or, most important of all, Rossetti's *House of Life*, where love, beauty and death are vaguely, inextricably, mixed. Yet again, a sonnet sequence may be an emotionally colored description of some phase of nature or of history, such as Wordsworth's *River Duddon* or Jones's *Christ in Britain*. Thus, no single subject limits the scope of the sonnet series. Not Platonic love alone but every kind, not youth alone but nearly every stage of experience and type of philosophic outlook has received rich utterance in this rhythm.

The conventional form of the sonnet sequence has not prevented extreme intensity and sincerity in substance. On the contrary, many a poet—a Michael Angelo, a Shakespeare, a Mrs. Browning, an Edna St. Vincent Millay—has made it the instrument of the most intimate confession. Under the cool disguise of the sonnet personal feelings are expressed that could not possibly be revealed more directly. And the quality of the poetry has thereby been heightened; for the stronger his emotions, the more carefully the artist must keep them within the bonds of his art.

It was into the mould of the sonnet therefore, that William Ellery Leonard poured the pity and terror of his own tragedy. "The austere form itself, the sonnet (if in any organic creation, whether oak-tree or poem, one can separate 'form itself' from essence, meaning, end) grew in-

evitably out of the need, an absolute need, of an especially austere control, masterful and unrelenting, over especially intense and fierce emotional experiences, while a certain freedom resulted from variations within the norm (rime-arrangement, management of the 'turn,' etc.), and from linking the sonnets as stanzas (both in narrative progress and in end-enjambments)."

There is no need then, for assuming that the sonnet sequence is an academic exercise, necessarily monotonous and inflexible. It is capable of infinite richness, infinite variety. It has been played on by many of the masters, in their brilliant and daring and revealing moments. And one may come to have a special delight in these miracles of economy. For brevity is not only the soul of wit but often of art and ecstasy as well.

SIDNEY LEE edited two volumes of Elizabethan sonnets, but the present book is the only comprehensive collection of sequences in English. It contains twenty-one separate groups and over seven hundred and fifty sonnets.

First of all, there are the supreme achievements in the field, those of Shakespeare, Mrs. Browning, and Rossetti, as well as the heterodox Meredith. *The House of Life* is ordinarily accessible only in the 1870 version of fifty sonnets but I have here included the final version of one hundred and three.

As the Elizabethan period is well represented by Sidney and Shakespeare, it seemed unnecessary to include Spenser, Drayton, or Daniel, whose sequences are, on the whole, tedious and distinguished only for a few individual sonnets.

Astrophel and Stella I have abridged from one hundred and ten to forty-four, thus eliminating much empty Petrarchan rhetoric and heightening perhaps, the total effect; but fortunately the abridgment retains all but two or three of the sonnets so much delighted in by Charles Lamb.

William Ellery Leonard's *Two Lives* I have also reduced, with the author's permission, from over two hundred sonnets to fifty.

Aside from three juvenile sonnets beginning "Woman ! When I behold thee flippant, vain," Keats wrote no actual sequences, but many of his sonnets were so closely bound up with his brief creative years that they form a kind of spiritual autobiography, and I have grouped thirty of them together.

Now, as to latter-day omissions, there was the problem of keeping the volume within some reasonable limits, while observing both poetic excellence and variety in subject-matter. For example, John Addington Symonds published two large collections of sonnets, *Animi Figura* and *Vagabunduli Libellus*, which were good enough in their way, but full of echoes and seemingly forced into groups. Blunt's *Esther* is inferior as poetry to his *Love Sonnets of Proteus*; yet the former strikes a less familiar note and has therefore been selected. On similar grounds I have thought that the naive work of David Gray and Alan Seeger would be of greater interest than some more finished sequences. G. E. Woodberry's *Ideal Sonnets* are ideal rather than passionate, and their scholarly serenity will also be found in Santayana. The sonnets of Masefield, printed together in the *Collected Poems*, do not form a sequence, he himself has pointed out. Except for one or two "portraits," Edwin Arlington Robinson has written only single sonnets.

Some readers may miss A. D. Ficke's *Sonnets of a Portrait Painter*, which, however, I have felt obliged to omit. Elinor Wylie's Donne-like sequence, *Angels and Earthly Creatures*, finished the night before her tragic death, was too recent to be adequately appraised.

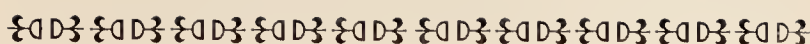
Of comparatively unknown or inaccessible sequences included are *In the Shadows* by David Gray; an early group of Thomas Hardy; the full nineteen *Holy Sonnets* of John

Donne; the last work of Eugene Lee-Hamilton; the only sonnets ever published by Conrad Aiken; and *Twenty Sonnets* by Edna St. Vincent Millay, as originally published before being scattered through three different volumes. It is also noteworthy that three of the four or five great women poets are here brought together.

Here, I think, is an ample feast, some excellent music. And for those who study poetry as well as enjoy it, here is an æsthetic laboratory for endless weighings and comparisons.

HOUSTON PETERSON

March 23, 1929
New York City



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THE BOOK OF SONNET SEQUENCES

ogie, "I yielded an inky tribute unto them." Without doubt *Astrophel and Stella* is that tribute, a sincere and passionate story of a futile love.

While accompanying the queen on one of her "processions" through England, Sidney met Penelope Devereux, a child of twelve, daughter of the Earl of Essex. They were attracted to one another even at that time and their eventual marriage was more or less taken for granted, much to the joy of her father. But shortly afterward Essex died and during the next several years Sidney, procrastinating, in financial difficulties as usual, seems to have taken no active steps to bind his engagement to Penelope. Then, suddenly, she was forced into marriage with the wealthy, calloused Lord Rich—and Sidney's well-restrained affection for her turned to flame. Indignation and remorse, pity and self-pity, goaded on desire and blackened "the smokes of melancholy." All this was the background of *Astrophel and Stella*, nicely summed up in the original introduction by Thomas Nashe: "the argument, cruel Chastity; the prologue, Hope; the epilogue, Despair." The story broke off sharply, helplessly, but Sidney gradually achieved resignation and took refuge in the Platonism which he had previously scoffed at. In two of his last sonnets he fiercely denounced Desire and lauded a Love beyond the realm of sense and time.¹

¹It is true that these two sonnets (as here appended) were not originally included in the "Astrophel and Stella" sequence, but as various critics have agreed, they were undoubtedly intended to be read in connection with it. "They strike me," said J. A. Symonds, "as retrospective, composed in a mood of stern and somewhat bitter meditation, and probably after some considerable interval; yet the Latin epigraph attached to the second has the force of an envoy. Moreover they undoubtedly represent the attitude of mind in which Sidney bade farewell to unhallowed love, and which enabled him loyally to plight his troth to Francis Walsingham."

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY
ASTROPHEL AND STELLA

3

I

Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show,
That she, dear she, might take some pleasure of my pain, —
Pleasure might cause her read, reading might make her
know, —

Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain, —
I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe;
Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain,
Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow
Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sunburn'd brain.
But words came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay;
Invention, Nature's child, fled step-dame Study's blows;
And others' feet still seem'd but strangers in my way.
Thus, great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes,
Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite;
Fool, said my Muse to me, look in thy heart, and write.

II

Virtue, alas, now let me take some rest;
Thou set'st a bate between my will and wit;
If vain Love have my simple soul oppress'd
Leave what thou lik'st not, deal not thou with it.
Thy sceptre use in some old Cato's breast,
Churches or schools are for thy seat more fit;
I do confess — pardon a fault confess'd —
My mouth too tender is for thy hard bit.
But if that needs thou wilt usurping be
The little reason that is left in me,
And still th' effect of thy persuasions prove,
I swear, my heart such one shall show to thee,
That shrines in flesh so true a deity,
That, Virtue, thou thyself shalt be in love.

III

It is most true that eyes are form'd to serve
The inward light, and that the heavenly part
Ought to be King, from whose rules who do swerve,
Rebels to Nature, strive for their own smart.
It is most true, what we call Cupid's dart
An image is, which for ourselves we crave,
And, fools, adore in temple of our heart,
Till that good god make church and churchmen starve.
True, that true beauty Virtue is indeed,
Whereof this beauty can be but a shade,
Which elements with mortal mixture breed.
True, that on earth we are but pilgrims made,
And should in soul up to our country move:
True, and yet true — that I must Stella love.

IV

Reason, in faith thou art well serv'd, that still
Wouldst brabbling be with Sense and Love in me;
I rather wish'd thee climb the Muses' hill;
Or reach the fruit of Nature's choicest tree;
Or seek heav'n's course or heav'n's inside to see:
Why shouldst thou toil our thorny soil to till?
Leave Sense, and those which Sense's objects be;
Deal thou with powers of thoughts, leave Love to Will.
But thou wouldst need fight both with Love and Sense,
With sword of wit giving wounds of dispraise,
Till down-right blows did foil thy cunning fence;
For, soon as they struck thee with Stella's rays,
Reason, thou kneel'dst, and offer'dst straight to prove,
By reason good, good reason her to love.

V

Alas, have I not pain enough, my friend,
Upon whose breast a fiercer gripe doth tire,
Than did on him who first stole down the fire,
While Love on me doth all his quiver spend —
But with your rhubarb words ye must contend,
To grieve me worse, in saying that Desire
Doth plunge my well-form'd soul even in the mire
Of sinful thoughts, which do in ruin end.
If that be sin which doth the manners frame,
Well staid with truth in words and faith of deed,
Ready of wit, and fearing nought but shame;
If that be sin, which in fix'd hearts doth breed
A loathing of all loose unchastity,
Then love is sin, and let me sinful be.

VI

You that do search for every purling spring
Which from the ribs of old Parnassus flows,
And every flower, not sweet perhaps, which grows
Near thereabouts, into your poesie wring;
Yet that do dictionary's method bring
Into your rhymes, running in rattling rows;
You that poor Petrarch's long deceased woes
With new-born sighs and denizen'd wit do sing:
You take wrong ways; those far-set helps be such
As do bewray a want of inward touch,
And sure, at length stolen goods do come to light;
But 'if, both for your love and skill, your name
You seek to nurse at fullest breasts of Fame,
Stella behold, and then begin to indite.

• VII

With what sharp checks I in myself am shent
When into Reason's audit I do go,
And by just 'counts myself a bankrupt know
Of all those goods which heav'n to me hath lent;
Unable quite to pay even Nature's rent,
Which unto it by birthright I do owe;
And, which is worse, no good excuse can show,
But that my wealth I have most idly spent !
My youth doth waste, my knowledge brings forth toys;
My wit doth strive those passions to defend,
Which, for reward, spoil it with vain annoys.
I see, my course to loose my self doth bend;
I see — and yet no greater sorrow take
Than that I loose no more for Stella's sake.

VIII

Your words, my friend, (right healthful caustics) I blame
My young mind marr'd, whom Love doth windlass so;
That mine own writings, like bad servants, show
My wits quick in vain thoughts, in virtue lame;
That Plato I read for nought but if he tame
Such coltish years; that to my birth I owe
Nobler desires, lest else that friendly foe,
Great expectation, wear a train of shame;
For since mad March great promise made of me,
If now the May of my years much decline,
What can be hoped my harvest-time will be ?
Sure, you say well. Your wisdom's golden mine
Dig deep with learning's spade. Now tell me this —
Hath this world aught so fair as Stella is ?

IX

The curious wits, seeing dull Pensiveness
Bewray itself in my long-settled eyes,
Whence those same fumes of melancholy rise,
With idle pains and missing aim, do guess.
Some, that know how my spring I did address,
Deem that my Muse some fruit of knowledge plies;
Others, because the prince my service tries,
Think that I think State errors to redress:
But harder judges judge ambition's rage —
Scourge of itself, still climbing slippery place —
Holds my young brain captiv'd in golden cage.
O fools, or overwise: alas, the race
Of all my thoughts hath neither stop nor start
But only Stella's eyes and Stella's heart.

X

Because I oft in dark abstracted guise
Seem most alone in greatest company,
With dearth of words, or answers quite awry,
To them that would make speech of speech arise;
They deem, and of their doom the rumour flies,
That poison foul of bubbling pride doth lie
So in my swelling breast, that only I
Fawn on myself, and others do despise.
Yet pride I think doth not my soul possess
(Which looks too oft in this unflattering glass):
But one worse fault, ambition, I confess,
That makes me oft my best friends overpass,
Unseen, unheard, while thought to highest place
Bends all his powers, even unto Stella's grace.

XI

With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climb'st the skies,
How silently, and with how wan a face !
What, may it be that even in heav'nly place
That busy archer his sharp arrows tries ?
Sure, if that long-with-love-acquainted eyes
Can judge of love, thou feel'st a lover's case,
I read it in thy looks; thy languisht grace,
To me, that feel the like, thy state describes.
Then, ev'n of fellowship, O Moon, tell me,
Is constant love deem'd there but want of wit ?
Are beauties there as proud as here they be ?
Do they above love to be lov'd, and yet
Those lovers scorn whom that love doth possess ?
Do they call virtue there ungratefulness ?

XII

I might ! — unhappy word — O me, I might,
And then would not, or could not, see my bliss;
Till now wrapt in a most infernal night,
I find how heav'nly day, wretch ! I did miss.
Heart, rent thyself, thou dost thyself but right;
No lovely Paris made thy Helen his;
No force, no fraud robb'd thee of thy delight,
Nor Fortune of thy fortune author is;
But to myself myself did give the blow,
While too much wit, forsooth, so troubled me,
That I respects for both our sakes must show:
And yet could not, by rising morn foresee
How fair a day was near: O punish'd eyes,
That I had been more foolish, or more wise !

XIII

What may words say, or what may words not say,
Where Truth itself must speak like Flattery ?
Within what bounds can one his liking stay,
Where Nature doth with infinite agree ?
What Nestor's Council can my flames allay,
Since Reason's self doth blow the coal in me ?
And, ah, what hope that Hope should once see day,
Where Cupid is sworn page to Chastity ?
Honour is honour'd, that thou dost possess
Him as thy slave, and now long-needy Fame
Doth even grow rich naming my Stella's name.
Wit learns in thee perfection to express,
Not thou by praise, but praise in thee is raised:
It is a praise to praise, when thou art praised.

XIV

My mouth doth water, and my breast doth swell,
My tongue doth itch, my thoughts in labour be:
Listen then, lordlings, with good ear to me,
For of my life I must a riddle tell.
'Towards Aurora's Court a nymph doth dwell,
Rich in all beauties which man's eyes can see;
Beauties so far from reach of words, that we
Abase her praise saying she doth excel;
Rich in the treasure of deserv'd renown,
Rich in the riches of a royal heart,
Rich in those gifts which give the eternal crown;
Who, though most rich in these and every part
Which make the patents of true worldly bliss,
Hath no misfortune but that Rich she is.

XV

Come, Sleep ! O Sleep, the certain knot of peace,
The baiting-place of wit, the balm of woe,
The poor man's wealth, the prisoner's release,
Th' indifferent judge between the high and low;
With shield of proof shield me from out the prease
Of those fierce darts Despair at me doth throw:
O make me in those civil wars to cease;
I will good tribute pay, if thou do so.
Take thou of me smooth pillows, sweetest bed,
A chamber deaf to noise and blind to light,
A rosy garland and a weary head:
And if these things, as being thine in right,
Move not thy heavy grace, thou shalt in me,
Livelier than elsewhere, Stella's image see.

XVI

Having this day my horse, my hand, my lance
Guided so well that I obtain'd the prize,
Both by the judgment of the English eyes
And of some sent from that sweet enemy France;
Horsemen my skill in horsemanship advance,
Town-folks my strength; a daintier judge applies
His praise to sleight which from good use doth rise;
Some lucky wits impute it but to chance;
Others, because of both sides I do take
My blood from them who did excel in this,
Think Nature me a man-at-arms did make.
How far they shot awry ! the true cause is,
Stella look'd on, and from her heav'nly face
Sent forth the beams which made so fair my race.

XVII

Stella oft sees the very face of woe
Painted in my beclouded stormy face,
But cannot skill to pity my disgrace,
Not though thereof the cause herself she know:
Yet hearing late a fable, which did show
Of lovers never known, a grievous case,
Pity thereof gat in her breast such place,
That, from that sea deriv'd, tears' spring did flow.
Alas, if Fancy, drawn by imag'd things
Though false, yet with free scope, more grace doth breed
Than servant's wreck, where new doubts honour brings;
Then think, my dear, that you in me do read
Of lovers' ruin some sad tragedy.
I am not I; pity the tale of me.

XVIII

What, have I thus betrayed my liberty !
Can those black beams such burning marks engrave
In my free side; or am I born a slave,
Whose neck becomes such yoke of tyranny !
Or want I sense to feel my misery,
Or sprite, disdain of such disdain to have !
Who for long faith, though daily help I crave,
May get no alms, but scorn of beggary.
Virtue, awake ! Beauty, but beauty is;
I may, I must, I can, I will, I do
Leave following that which it is gain to miss.
Let her go ! Soft, but here she comes ! Go to,
Unkind, I love you not ! O me, that eye
Doth make my heart give to my tongue the lie !

XIX

Soul's joy, bend not those morning stars from me,
Where Virtue is made strong by Beauty's might;
Where Love is chasteness, Pain doth learn delight,
And Humbleness grows one with Majesty.
Whatever may ensue, O let me be
Copartner of the riches of that sight;
Let not mine eyes be hell-driv'n from that light;
O look, O shine, O let me die, and see.
For though I oft myself of them bemoan
That through my heart their beamy darts be gone,
Whose cureless wounds even now most freshly bleed,
Yet since my death-wound is already got,
Dear killer, spare not thy sweet-cruel shot;
A kind of grace it is to slay with speed.

XX

Stella, the fulness of my thoughts of thee
Cannot be stayed within my panting breast,
But they do swell and struggle forth of me,
Till that in words thy figure be express'd;
And yet, as soon as they so formèd be,
According to my lord Love's own behest,
With sad eyes I their weak proportion see
To portrait that which in this world is best.
So that I cannot choose but write my mind,
And cannot choose but put out what I write,
While these poor babes their death in birth do find;
And now my pen these lines had dashèd quite,
But that they stopp'd his fury from the same,
Because their fore-front bear sweet Stella's name.

XXI

A strife is grown between Virtue and Love,
While each pretends that Stella must be his:
Her eyes, her lips, her all, saith Love, do this,
Since they do wear his badge, most firmly prove.
But Virtue thus that title doth disprove,
That Stella, — O dear name ! that Stella is
That virtuous soul, sure heir of heav'nly bliss,
Not this fair outside, which our heart doth move:
And therefore, though her beauty and her grace
Be Love's indeed, in Stella's self he may
By no pretence claim any manner place.
Well, Love, since this demur our suit doth stay,
Let Virtue have that Stella's self; yet thus,
That Virtue but that body grant to us.

XXII

Because I breathe not love to every one,
Nor do not use set colours for to wear,
Nor nourish special locks of vowèd hair,
Nor give each speech a full point of a groan,
The Courtly nymphs, acquainted with the moan
Of them which in their lips Love's standard bear:
What, he ! (say they of me): now I dare swear
He cannot love; no, no, let him alone.
And think so still, so Stella know my mind;
Profess in deed I do not Cupid's art;
But you, fair maids, at length this true shall find,
That his right badge is but worn in the heart;
Dumb swans, not chattering pies, do lovers prove;
They love indeed who quake to say they love.

XXIII

When my good angel guides me to the place
Where all my good I do in Stella see,
That heav'n of joys throws only down on me
Thund'ring disdains and lightnings of disgrace;
But when the rugged'st step of Fortune's race
Makes me fall from her sight, then sweetly she,
With words wherein the Muses' treasures be,
Shows love and pity to my absent case.
Now I wit-beaten long by hardest fate,
So dull am, that I cannot look into
The ground of this fierce love and lovely hate.
Then, some good body, tell me how I do,
Whose presence absence, absence presence is;
Blest in my curse, and cursèd in my bliss.

XXIV

Late tired with woe, even ready for to pine
With rage of love, I called my Love unkind;
She in whose eyes love, though unfelt, doth shine,
Sweet said, that I true love in her should find.
I joyed; but straight thus water'd was my wine, —
That love she did, but loved a love not blind;
Which would not let me, whom she loved, decline
From nobler cause, fit for my birth and mind:
And therefore, by her love's authority,
Willed me these tempests of vain love to fly,
And anchor fast myself on Virtue's shore.
Alas, if this the only metal be
Of love new coin'd to help my beggary,
Dear, love me not, that you may love me more.

XXV

No more, my dear, no more these counsels try;
O give my passions leave to run their race;
Let Fortune lay on me her worst disgrace;
Let folk o'ercharged with brain against me cry;
Let clouds bedim my face, break in mine eye;
Let me no steps but of lost labour trace;
Let all the earth with scorn recount my case, —
But do not will me from my love to fly.
I do not envy Aristotle's wit,
Nor do aspire to Cæsar's bleeding fame;
Nor ought do care though some above me sit;
Nor hope nor wish another course to frame,
But that which once may win thy cruel heart:
Thou art my wit, and thou my virtue art.

XXVI

And do I see some cause a hope to feed,
Or doth the tedious burden of long woe
In weakened minds quick apprehending breed
Of every image which may comfort show?
I cannot brag of word, much less of deed,
Fortune's wheel's still with me in one sort slow;
My wealth no more, and no whit less my need;
Desire still on stilts of fear doth go.
And yet amid all fears a hope there is,
Stol'n to my heart since last fair night, nay day,
Stella's eyes sent to me the beams of bliss,
Looking on me while I look'd other way:
But when mine eyes back to their heav'n did move,
They fled with blush which guilty seem'd of love.

XXVII

Hope, art thou true, or dost thou flatter me ?
Doth Stella now begin with piteous eye
The ruins of her Conquest to espy ?
Will she take time before all wrecked be ?
Her eyes-speech is translated thus by thee,
But fail'st thou not in phrase so heav'nly high ?
Look on again, the fair text better pry;
What blushing notes dost thou in margin see ?
What sighs stol'n out, or kill'd before full-born ?
Hast thou found such and such-like arguments,
Or art thou else to comfort me forsworn ?
Well, how-so thou interpret the contents,
I am resolv'd thy error to maintain,
Rather than by more truth to get more pain.

XXVIII

Stella, the only planet of my light,
Light of my life, and life of my desire,
Chief good whereto my hope doth only aspire,
World of my wealth, and heav'n of my delight;
Why dost thou spend the treasures of thy sprite
With force more fit to wed Amphion's lyre,
Seeking to quench in me the nobler fire
Fed by thy worth, and kindled by thy sight ?
And all in vain: for while thy breath most sweet
With choicest words, thy words with reasons rare,
Thy reasons firmly set on Virtue's feet,
Labour to kill in me this killing care:
O think I then, what paradise of joy
It is, so fair a virtue to enjoy !

XXIX

O joy too high for my low style to show !
O bliss fit for a nobler state than me !
Envy, put out thine eyes, lest thou do see
What oceans of delight in me do flow !
My friend, that oft saw through all masks my woe,
Come, come, and let me pour myself on thee.
Gone is the winter of my misery !
My spring appears; O see what here doth grow:
For Stella hath, with words where faith doth shine,
Of her high heart giv'n me the monarchy:
I, I, Oh I, may say that she is mine !
And though she give but thus conditionly,
This realm of bliss while virtuous course I take,
No kings be crown'd but they some covenants make.

XXX

My Muse may well grudge at my heav'nly joy,
If still I force her in sad rhymes to creep:
She oft hath drunk my tears, now hopes to enjoy
Nectar of mirth, since I Jove's cup do keep.
Sonnets be not bound prentice to annoy;
Trebles sing high, so well as basses deep;
Grief but Love's winter-livery is; the boy
Hath cheeks to smile, so well as eyes to weep.
Come then, my Muse, show the force of delight
In well-rais'd notes; my pen, the best it may,
Shall pant out joy, though but in black and white.
Cease, eager Muse; peace, pen, for my sake stay,
I give you here my hand for truth of this, —
Wise silence is best music unto bliss.

XXXI

Who will in fairest book of Nature know
How virtue may best lodg'd in beauty be,
Let him but learn of Love to read in thee,
Stella, those fair lines which true goodness show.
There shall he find all vices' overthrow,
Not by rude force, but sweetest sovereignty
Of reason, from whose light those night-birds fly,
That inward sun in thine eyes shineth so.
And, not content to be Perfection's heir
Thyself, dost strive all minds that way to move,
Who mark in thee what is in thee most fair:
So while thy beauty draws the heart to love,
As fast thy virtue bends that love to good:
But, ah, Desire still cries, give me some food.

XXXII

Desire, though thou my old companion art,
And oft so clings to my pure love that I
One from the other scarcely can descry,
While each doth blow the fire of my heart;
Now from thy fellowship I needs must part;
Venus is taught with Dian's wings to fly;
I must no more in thy sweet passions lie;
Virtue's gold now must head my Cupid's dart.
Service and honour, wonder with delight,
Fear to offend, will worthy to appear,
Care shining in mine eyes, faith in my sprite;
These things are left me by my only Dear:
But thou, Desire, because thou wouldst have all,
Now banish'd art; but yet, alas, how shall ?

XXXIII

I never drank of Aganippe well,
Nor ever did in shade of Tempe sit,
And Muses scorn with vulgar brains to dwell;
Poor layman I, for sacred rites unfit.
Some do I hear of poets' fury tell,
But, God wot, wot not what they mean by it;
And this I swear by blackest brook of hell,
I am no pick-purse of another's wit.
How falls it then, that with so smooth an ease
My thoughts I speak; and what I speak doth flow
In verse, and that my verse best wits doth please?
Guess we the cause? What, is it this: Fie, no.
Or so? Much less. How then? Sure thus it is,
My lips are sweet, inspired with Stella's kiss.

XXXIV

O kiss, which doth those ruddy gems impart,
Or gems or fruits of new-found Paradise,
Breathing all bliss, and sweet'ning to the heart,
Teaching dumb lips a nobler exercise; —
O kiss, which souls, even souls, together ties
By links of love and only Nature's art,
How fain would I paint thee to all men's eyes,
Or of thy gifts at least shade out some part!
But she forbids; with blushing words she says
She builds her fame on higher-seated praise.
But my heart burns; I cannot silent be.
Then, since, dear life, you fain would have me peace,
And I, mad with delight, want wit to cease,
Stop you my mouth with still, still kissing me.

XXXV

High way, since you my chief Parnassus be,
And that my Muse, to some ears not unsweet,
Tempers her words to trampling horses' feet
More oft than to a chamber-melody.
Now blessèd you bear onward blessed me
To her, where I my heart, safe-left, shall meet;
My Muse and I must you of duty greet
With thanks and wishes, wishing thankfully.
Be you still fair, honour'd by public heed;
By no encroachment wrong'd, nor time forgot;
Nor blam'd for blood, nor sham'd for sinful deed;
And that you know I envy you no lot
Of highest wish, I wish you so much bliss, —
Hundreds of years you Stella's feet may kiss.

XXXVI

When I was forc'd from Stella ever dear —
Stella, food of my thoughts, heart of my heart —
Stella, whose eyes make all my tempests clear —
By Stella's laws of duty to depart;
Alas, I found that she with me did smart;
I saw that tears did in her eyes appear;
I saw that sighs her sweetest lips did part,
And her sad words my saddest sense did hear.
For me, I wept to see pearls scatter'd so;
I sigh'd her sighs, and wailed for her woe;
Yet swam in joy, such love in her was seen.
Thus, while th' effect most bitter was to me,
And nothing then the cause more sweet could be,
I had been vex'd, if vex'd I had not been.

XXXVII

Stella, think not that I by verse seek fame,
Who seek, who hope, who love, who live but thee;
Thine eyes my pride, thy lips mine history:
If thou praise not, all other praise is shame.
Nor so ambitious am I, as to frame
A nest for my young praise in laurel tree:
In truth, I swear I wish not there should be
Graved in my epitaph a Poet's name.
Nor, if I would, could I just title make,
That any laud thereof to me should grow,
Without my plumes from others' wings I take:
For nothing from my wit or will doth flow,
Since all my words thy beauty doth indite,
And Love doth hold my hand, and makes me write.

XXXVIII

Be your words made, good Sir, of Indian ware,
That you allow me them by so small rate ?
Or do you curted Spartans imitate ?
Or do you mean my tender ears to spare,
That to my questions you so total are ?
When I demand of Phoenix-Stella's state,
You say, forsooth, you left her well of late:
O God, think you that satisfies my care ?
I would know whether she did sit or walk;
How cloth'd; how waited on; sigh'd she, or smil'd;
Whereof, — with whom, — how often did she talk;
With what pastime Time's journey she beguiled;
If her lips deign'd to sweeten my poor name.
Say all; and all well said, still say the same.

XXXIX

O Tears ! no tears, but rain, from Beauty's skies,
Making those lilies and those roses grow,
Which aye most fair, now more than most fair show,
While graceful Pity Beauty beautifies.
O honied sighs ! which from that breast do rise,
Whose pants do make unspilling cream to flow,
Wing'd with whose breath, so pleasing zephyrs blow,
As might refresh the hell where my soul fries.
O plaints ! conserv'd in such a sugar'd phrase,
That Eloquence itself envies your praise,
While sobb'd-out words a perfect music give.
Such tears, sighs, plaints, no sorrow is, but joy:
Or if such heav'nly signs must prove annoy,
All mirth farewell, let me in sorrow live.

XL

O Happy Thames, that didst my Stella bear !
I saw thee with full many a smiling line
Upon thy cheerful face, Joy's livery wear,
While those fair planets on thy stream did shine.
The boat for joy could not to dance forbear,
While wanton winds, with beauties so divine
Ravish'd, stay'd not, till in her golden hair
They did themselves, O sweetest prison, twine.
And fain those Æol's youth there would their stay
Have made, but forc'd by Nature still to fly,
First did with puffing kiss those locks display:
She so dishevell'd blush'd: from window I
With sight thereof cried out, 'O fair disgrace,
Let Honour's self to thee grant highest place.'

XLI

Envious wits, what hath been mine offence,
That with such poisonous care my looks you mark,
That to each word, nay sigh of mine you hark,
As grudging me my sorrow's eloquence ?
Ah, is it not enough, that I am thence,
Thence, so far thence, that scanty any spark
Of comfort dare come to this dungeon dark,
Where Rigour's exile locks up all my sense ?
But if I by a happy window pass,
If I but stars upon mine armour bear;
Sick, thirsty, glad (though but of empty glass):
Your moral notes straight my hid meaning tear
From out my ribs, and, puffing, prove that I
Do Stella love: fools, who doth it deny ?

XLII

When Sorrow (using mine own fire's might)
Melts down his lead into my boiling breast,
Through that dark furnace to my heart oppress'd,
There shines a joy from thee my only light:
But soon as thought of thee breeds my delight,
And my young soul flutters to thee his nest,
Most rude Despair, my daily unbidden guest,
Clips straight my wings, straight wraps me in his night,
And makes me then bow down my head, and say,
Ah, what does Phoebus' gold that wretch avail
Whom iron doors do keep from use of day ?
So strangely ! alas, thy works in me prevail,
That in my woes for thee thou art my joy,
And in my joys for thee my only annoy.

XLIII

Thou blind man's mark, thou fool's self-chosen snare,
Fond fancy's scum, and dregs of scattered thought:
Band of all evils; cradle of causeless care;
Thou web of will, whose end is never wrought:
Desire ! Desire ! I have too dearly bought,
With price of mangled mind, thy worthless ware;
Too long, too long, asleep thou hast me brought,
Who shouldst my mind to higher things prepare.
But yet in vain thou hast my ruin sought;
In vain thou mad'st me to vain things aspire;
In vain thou kindlest all thy smoky fire;
For Virtue hath this better lesson taught, —
Within myself to seek my only hire,
Desiring nought but how to kill Desire.

XLIV

Leave me, O Love, which reachest but to dust;
And thou, my mind, aspire to higher things;
Grow rich in that which never taketh rust;
Whatever fades, but fading pleasures brings.
Draw in thy beams, and humble all thy might
To that sweet yoke, where lasting freedoms be;
Which breaks the clouds, and opens forth the light
That doth both shine, and give us sight to see.
O take fast hold; let that light be thy guide
In this small course which birth draws out to death,
And think how evil becometh him to slide,
Who seeketh heav'n, and comes of heav'nly breath.
Then farewell, world; thy uttermost I see:
Eternal Love, maintain thy Life in me.

Splendidis longum valedico nugis.

II — WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

[1564-1616]

IN 1609 Shakespeare's sonnets were published in a pirated edition, by one Thomas Thorpe, with the following dedication:

*To The Onlie Begetter Of
 These Insuing Sonnets
 Mr. W. H. All Happinesse
 And That Eternitie
 Promised
 By
 Our Ever-Living Poet
 Wisheth
 The Well-Wishing
 Adventurer in
 Setting
 Forth.
 T.T.*

That seemingly simple dedication reflects all the mystery and ambiguity which surround the origin of Shakespeare's sonnets. It is not known whether "onlie begetter" pertains to the person who secured the manuscript for Thorpe; or to the person who inspired the author. Assuming the latter, it is still impossible to prove the identity of "Mr. W. H." He may have been Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton, to whom *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* were dedicated; this would date the writing of the sonnets around 1594. He may have been William Herbert, later the Earl of Pembroke, who was at one time the lover of Mary Fitton, lady-in-waiting to the queen and since resuscitated as "the dark lady of the sonnets"; this would date them around 1600. Or finally, "Mr. W. H." may have been some very obscure friend whom Shakespeare wished to honor—if not an entirely fictitious personage invented for the sake

of advertising mystery ! And in any case, it is not at all obvious or definitely established that he is identical with the friend who is the chief subject of the sonnets. In short, we are ignorant of every important circumstance concerning the origin of Shakespeare's sonnets, and consequently they have long been a fertile field for erudite, brilliant and irresponsible speculation.

There are those who consider the sonnets a literal piece of autobiography, an unvarnished personal confession, largely painful and humiliating, which Shakespeare permitted to circulate among his friends. They reveal the man Shakespeare in all his human qualities and are the one invaluable introduction to the plays. "With this key," said Wordsworth of the sonnet form, "Shakespeare unlocked his heart." "If so, the less Shakespeare he !" replied Browning, and there are many who echo him, accepting the autobiographical interpretation, but only with profound regret. In spite of all the beauties of the sonnets, Hallam declared that "it is impossible not to wish that Shakespeare had never written them."

On the other hand, there is that school of critics, led by the redoubtable Sidney Lee, which insists that the sonnets are nothing if not impersonal, that they are elaborate, ambitious exercises of fancy written at a time when sequences were in high fashion and the profession of the playwright was far from exalted. If our view of Shakespeare as a great man forbids us to think of him involved in sordid, disgraceful entanglements, our view of him as a supreme poet forbids us to think of him making literal, direct use of petty, private experiences. No, the sonnets were essentially "trials of skill" in which Shakespeare employed the conventional themes and conceits of a thousand descendants of Petrarch, but with a far greater appearance of sincerity and intensity because of his unique dramatic genius.

Between these two opposing interpretations the reader must find his own mediating way. Doubtless Shakes-

peare wrote from his heart as he also wrote from his fancy, but no aesthetic physiologist can show where the one ends and the other begins; and in an age that makes ethics a branch of psychology it must be evident that the achievements of Shakespeare do not exclude the possibility that he was a sensualist and a sinner, capable of an overwhelming devotion to a man as well as a mad passion for a woman, capable of envying his rivals as well as being ashamed of his own profession.

But whatever the personal elements, here are one hundred and fifty-four sonnets, in the peculiar form which Shakespeare perfected, and nearly all of an immortal texture. They speak for any one who clings to love and beauty in a ruthlessly changing world.

I

From fairest creatures we desire increase,
That thereby beauty's rose might never die,
But as the ripper should by time decease,
His tender heir might bear his memory:
But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes,
Feed'st thy light's flame with self-substantial fuel,
Making a famine where abundance lies,
Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel.
Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament
And only herald to the gaudy spring,
Within thine own bud buriest thy content
And, tender churl, makest waste in niggarding.
Pity the world, or else this glutton be,
To eat the world's due, by the grave and thee.

II

When forty winters shall besiege thy brow
And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,
Thy youth's proud livery, so gazed on now,
Will be a tatter'd weed, of small worth held:
Then being ask'd where all thy beauty lies,
Where all the treasure of thy lusty days,
To say, within thine own deep-sunken eyes,
Were an ill-eating shame and thriftless praise.
How much more praise deserved thy beauty's use,
If thou couldst answer 'This fair child of mine
Shall sum my count and make my old excuse,'
Proving his beauty by succession thine!
This were to be new made when thou art old,
And see thy blood warm when thou feel'st it cold.

III

Look in thy glass, and tell the face thou viewest
Now is the time that face should form another;
Whose fresh repair if now thou not renewest,
Thou dost beguile the world, unbless some mother.
For where is she so fair whose unear'd womb
Disdains the tillage of thy husbandry ?
Or who is he so fond will be the tomb
Of his self-love, to stop posterity ?
Thou art thy mother's glass, and she in thee
Calls back the lovely April of her prime:
So thou through windows of thine age shalt see,
Despite of wrinkles, this thy golden time.
But if thou live, remember'd not to be,
Die single, and thine image dies with thee.

IV

Unthrifty loveliness, why dost thou spend
Upon thyself thy beauty's legacy ?
Nature's bequest gives nothing, but doth lend,
And being frank, she lends to those are free.
Then, beauteous niggard, why dost thou abuse
The bounteous largess given thee to give ?
Profitless usurer, why dost thou use
So great a sum of sums, yet canst not live ?
For having traffic with thyself alone,
Thou of thyself thy sweet self dost deceive.
Then how, when nature calls thee to be gone,
What acceptable audit canst thou leave ?
Thy unused beauty must be tom'd with thee,
Which, used, lives th' executor to be.

V

Those hours that with gentle work did frame
The lovely gaze where every eye doth dwell,
Will play the tyrants to the very same
And that unfair which fairly doth excel:
For never-resting time leads summer on
To hideous winter and confounds him there;
Sap check'd with frost and lusty leaves quite gone,
Beauty o'ersnow'd and bareness every where:
Then, were not summer's distillation left,
A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass,
Beauty's effect with beauty were bereft,
Nor it, nor no remembrance what it was:
But flowers distill'd, though they with winter meet,
Leese but their show; their substance still lives sweet.

VI

Then let not winter's ragged hand deface
In thee thy summer, ere thou be distill'd:
Make sweet some vial; treasure thou some place
With beauty's treasure, ere it be self-kill'd.
That use is not forbidden usury,
Which happies those that pay the willing loan;
That's for thyself to breed another thee,
Or ten times happier, be it ten for one;
Ten times thyself were happier than thou art,
If ten of thine ten times refigured thee:
Then what could death do, if thou shouldst depart,
Leaving thee living in posterity?
Be not self-will'd, for thou art much too fair
To be death's conquest and make worms thine heir.

VII

Lo, in the orient when the gracious light
Lifts up his burning head, each under eye
Doth homage to his new-appearing sight,
Serving with looks his sacred majesty;
And having climb'd the steep-up heavenly hill,
Resembling strong youth in his middle age,
Yet mortal looks adore his beauty still,
Attending on his golden pilgrimage;
But when from highmost pitch, with weary car,
Like feeble age, he reeleth from the day,
The eyes, 'fore duteous, now converted are
From his low tract, and look another way:
So thou, thyself out-going in thy noon,
Unlook'd on diest, unless thou get a son.

VIII

Music to hear, why hear'st thou music sadly?
Sweets with sweets war not, joy delights in joy.
Why lovest thou that which thou receivest not gladly,
Or else receivest with pleasure thine annoy?
If the true concord of well tuned sounds,
By unions married, do offend thine ear,
They do but sweetly chide thee, who confounds
In singleness the parts that thou shouldst bear.
Mark how one string, sweet husband to another,
Strikes each in each by mutual ordering;
Resembling sire and child and happy mother,
Whó, all in one, one pleasing note do sing:
Whose speechless song, being many, seeming one,
Sings this to thee: 'Thou single wilt prove none.'

IX

Is it for fear to wet a widow's eye
That thou consumest thyself in single life ?
Ah ! if thou issueless shalt hap to die,
The world will wail thee, like a makeless wife;
The world will be thy widow, and still weep
That thou no form of thee hast left behind,
When every private widow well may keep
By children's eyes her husband's shape in mind.
Look, what an unthrift in the world doth spend
Shifts but his place, for still the world enjoys it;
But beauty's waste hath in the world an end,
And kept unused, the user so destroys it.
No love toward others in that bosom sits
That on himself such murderous shame commits.

X

For shame ! deny that thou bear'st love to any,
Who for thyself art so unprovident.
Grant, if thou wilt, thou art beloved of many,
But that thou none lovest is most evident;
For thou art so possess'd with murderous hate
That 'gainst thyself thou stick'st not to conspire,
Seeking that beauteous roof to ruinate
Which to repair should be thy chief desire.
O, change thy thought, that I may change my mind !
Shall hate be fairer lodged than gentle love ?
Be, as thy presence is, gracious and kind,
Or to thyself at least kind-hearted prove:
Make thee another self, for love of me,
That beauty still may live in thine or thee.

XI

As fast as thou shalt wane, so fast thou grow'st
In one of thine, from that which thou departest;
And that fresh blood which youngly thou bestow'st
Thou mayst call thine when thou from youth convertest.
Herein lives wisdom, beauty and increase;
Without this, folly, age and cold decay:
If all were minded so, the times should cease
And threescore year would make the world away.
Let those whom Nature hath not made for store,
Harsh, featureless and rude, barrenly perish:
Look, whom she best endow'd she gave the more;
Which bounteous gift thou shouldst in bounty cherish:
She carved thee for her seal, and meant thereby
Thou shouldst print more, not let that copy die.

XII

When I do count the clock that tells the time,
And see the brave day sunk in hideous night;
When I behold the violet past prime,
And sable curls all silver'd o'er with white;
When lofty trees I see barren of leaves,
Which erst from heat did canopy the herd,
And summer's green all girded up in sheaves,
Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard,
Then of thy beauty do I question make,
That thou among the wastes of time must go,
Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake
And die as fast as they see others grow;
And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defence
Save breed, to brave him when he takes thee hence.

XIII

O, that you were yourself ! but, love, you are
No longer yours than you yourself here live:
Against this coming end you should prepare,
And your sweet semblance to some other give.
So should that beauty which you hold in lease
Find no determination; then you were
Yourself again, after yourself's decease,
When your sweet issue your sweet form should bear.
Who lets so fair a house fall to decay,
Which husbandry in honour might uphold
Against the stormy gusts of winter's day
And barren rage of death's eternal cold ?
O, none but unthrifths: dear my love, you know
You had a father; let your son say so.

XIV

Not from the stars do I my judgement pluck;
And yet methinks I have astronomy,
But not to tell of good or evil luck,
Of plagues, of dearths, or seasons' quality;
Nor can I fortune to brief minutes tell,
Pointing to each his thunder, rain and wind,
Or say with princes if it shall go well,
By oft predict that I in heaven find:
But from thine eyes my knowledge I derive,
And, constant stars, in them I read such art,
As truth and beauty shall together thrive,
If from thyself to store thou wouldst convert;
Or else of thee this I prognosticate:
Thy end is truth's and beauty's doom and date.

XV

When I consider every thing that grows
Holds in perfection but a little moment,
That this huge stage presenteth nought but shows
Whereon the stars in secret influence comment;
When I perceive that men as plants increase,
Cheered and check'd even by the self-same sky,
Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height decrease,
And wear their brave state out of memory;
Then the conceit of this inconstant stay
Sets you most rich in youth before my sight,
Where wasteful Time debateth with Decay,
To change your day of youth to sullied night;
And all in war with Time for love of you,
As he takes from you, I engraft you new.

XVI

But wherefore do not you a mightier way
Make war upon this bloody tyrant, Time?
And fortify yourself in your decay
With means more blessed than my barren rhyme?
Now stand you on the top of happy hours,
And many maiden gardens, yet unset,
With virtuous wish would bear your living flowers
Much liker than your painted counterfeit:
So should the lines of life that life repair,
Which this, Time's pencil, or my pupil pen,
Neither in inward worth nor outward fair,
Can make you live yourself in eyes of men.
To give away yourself keeps yourself still;
And you must live, drawn by your own sweet skill.

XVII

Who will believe my verse in time to come,
If it were fill'd with your most high deserts ?
Though yet, heaven knows, it is but as a tomb
Which hides your life and shows not half your parts.
If I could write the beauty of your eyes
And in fresh numbers number all your graces,
The age to come would say 'This poet lies;
Such heavenly touches ne'er touch'd earthly faces.'
So should my papers, yellowed with their age,
Be scorn'd, like old men of less truth than tongue,
And your true rights be term'd a poet's rage
And stretched metre of an antique song:
But were some child of yours alive that time,
You should live twice, in it and in my rhyme.

XVIII

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day ?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

XIX

Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws,
And make the earth devour her own sweet brood;
Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger's jaws,
And burn the long-lived phoenix in her blood;
Make glad and sorry seasons as thou fleet'st,
And do whate'er thou wilt, swift-footed Time,
To the wide world and all her fading sweets;
But I forbid thee one most heinous crime:
O, carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow,
Nor draw no lines there with thine antique pen;
Him in thy course untainted do allow
For beauty's pattern to succeeding men.
Yet do thy worst, old Time: despite thy wrong,
My love shall in my verse ever live young.

XX

A woman's face with Nature's own hand painted
Hast thou, the master-mistress of my passion;
A woman's gentle heart, but not acquainted
With shifting change, as is false women's fashion;
An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling,
Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;
A man in hue, all 'hues' in his controlling,
Which steals men's eyes and women's souls amazeth.
And for a woman wert thou first created;
Till Nature, as she wrought thee, fell a-doting,
And by addition me of thee defeated,
By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.
But since she prick'd thee out for women's pleasure,
Mine be thy love, and thy love's use their treasure.

XXI

So is it not with me as with that Muse
Stirr'd by a painted beauty to his verse,
Who heaven itself for ornament doth use
And every fair with his fair doth rehearse,
Making a couplement of proud compare,
With sun and moon, with earth and sea's rich gems,
With April's first-born flowers, and all things rare
That heaven's air in this huge rondure hems.
O, let me, true in love, but truly write,
And then believe me, my love is as fair
As any mother's child, though not so bright
As those gold candles fix'd in heaven's air:
Let them say more that like of hearsay well;
I will not praise that purpose not to sell.

XXII

My glass shall not persuade me I am old,
So long as youth and thou are of one date;
But when in thee time's furrows I behold,
Then look I death my days should expiate.
For all that beauty that doth cover thee
Is but the seemly raiment of my heart,
Which in thy breast doth live, as thine in me:
How can I then be elder than thou art?
O, therefore, love, be of thyself so wary
As I, not for myself, but for thee will;
Bearing thy heart, which I will keep so chary
As tender nurse her babe from faring ill.
Presume not on thy heart when mine is slain;
Thou gavest me thine, not to give back again.

XXIII

As an unperfect actor on the stage,
Who with his fear is put besides his part,
Or some fierce thing replete with too much rage,
Whose strength's abundance weakens his own heart;
So I, for fear of trust, forget to say
The perfect ceremony of love's rite,
And in mine own love's strength seem to decay,
O'ercharged with burthen of mine own love's might.
O, let my books be then the eloquence
And dumb presagers of my speaking breast;
Who plead for love, and look for recompense,
More than that tongue that more hath more express'd.
O, learn to read what silent love hath writ:
To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit.

XXIV

Mine eye hath play'd the painter and hath stell'd
Thy beauty's form in table of my heart;
My body is the frame wherein 'tis held,
And perspective it is best painter's art.
For through the painter must you see his skill,
To find where your true image pictured lies;
Which in my bosom's shop is hanging still,
That hath his windows glazed with thine eyes.
Now see what good turns eyes for eyes have done:
Mine eyes have drawn thy shape, and thine for me
Are windows to my breast, where-through the sun
Delights to peep, to gaze therein on thee;
Yet eyes this cunning want to grace their art,
They draw but what they see, know not the heart.

XXV

Let those who are in favour with their stars
Of public honour and proud titles boast,
Whilst I, whom fortune of such triumph bars,
Unlook'd for joy in that I honour most.
Great princes' favourites their fair leaves spread
But as the marigold at the sun's eye,
And in themselves their pride lies buried,
For at a frown they in their glory die.
The painful warrior famoused for fight,
After a thousand victories once foil'd,
Is from the book of honour razed quite,
And all the rest forgot for which he toil'd:
Then happy I, that love and am beloved
Where I may not remove nor be removed.

XXVI

Lord of my love, to whom in vassalage
Thy merit hath my duty strongly knit,
To thee I send this written ambassage,
To witness duty, not to show my wit:
Duty so great, which wit so poor as mine
May make seem bare, in wanting words to show it,
But that I hope some good conceit of thine
In thy soul's thought, all naked, will bestow it;
Till whatsoever star that guides my moving,
Points on me graciously with fair aspect,
And puts apparel on my tatter'd loving,
To show me worthy of thy sweet respect:
Then may I dare to boast how I do love thee;
Till then not show my head where thou mayst prove me.

XXVII

Weary with toil, I haste me to my bed,
The dear repose for limbs with travel tired;
But then begins a journey in my head,
To work my mind, when body's work's expired:
For then my thoughts, from far where I abide,
Intend a zealous pilgrimage to thee,
And keep my drooping eyelids open wide,
Looking on darkness which the blind do see:
Save that my soul's imaginary sight
Presents thy shadow to my sightless view,
Which, like a jewel hung in ghastly night,
Makes black night beauteous and her old face new.
Lo, thus, by day my limbs, by night my mind,
For thee and for myself no quiet find.

XXVIII

How can I then return in happy plight,
That am debarr'd the benefit of rest?
When day's oppression is not eased by night,
But day by night, and night by day, oppress'd?
And each, though enemies to either's reign,
Do in consent shake hands to torture me;
The one by toil, the other to complain
How far I toil, still farther off from thee.
I tell the day, to please him thou art bright,
And dost him grace when clouds do blot the heaven:
So flatter I the swart-complexion'd night;
When sparkling stars twire not thou gild'st the even.
But day doth daily draw my sorrows longer,
And night doth nightly make grief's strength seem stronger.

XXIX

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweepe my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself, and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possess'd,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

XXX

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste:
Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,
For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,
And weep afresh love's long since cancell'd woe,
And moan the expense of many a vanish'd sight:
Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,
And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er
The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,
Which I new pay as if not paid before.
But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restored and sorrows end.

XXXI

Thy bosom is endeared with all hearts,
Which I by lacking have supposed dead;
And there reigns love, and all love's loving parts,
And all those friends which I thought buried.
How many a holy and obsequious tear
Hath dear religious love stol'n from mine eye,
As interest of the dead, which now appear
But things removed that hidden in thee lie !
Thou art the grave where buried love doth live,
Hung with the trophies of my lovers gone,
Who all their parts of me to thee did give:
That due of many now is thine alone:
Their images I loved I view in thee,
And thou, all they, hast all the all of me.

XXXII

If thou survive my well-contented day,
When that churl Death my bones with dust shall cover,
And shalt by fortune once more re-survey
These poor rude lines of thy deceased lover,
Compare them with the bettering of the time,
And though they be outstripp'd by every pen,
Reserve them for my love, not for their rhyme,
Exceeded by the height of happier men.
O, then vouchsafe me but this loving thought:
'Had my friend's Muse grown with this growing age,
A dearer birth than this his love had brought,
To march in ranks of better equipage:
But since he died, and poets better prove,
Theirs for their style I'll read, his for his love.'

XXXIII

Full many a glorious morning have I seen
Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign eye,
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy;
Anon permit the basest clouds to ride
With ugly rack on his celestial face,
And from the forlorn world his visage hide,
Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace:
Even so my sun one early morn did shine
With all-triumphant splendour on my brow;
But, out, alack ! he was but one hour mine,
The region cloud hath mask'd him from me now.
Yet him for this my love no whit disdaineth;
Suns of the world may stain when heaven's sun staineth.

XXXIV

Why didst thou promise such a beauteous day,
And make me travel forth without my cloak,
To let base clouds o'ertake me in my way,
Hiding thy bravery in their rotten smoke ?
'Tis not enough that through the cloud thou break,
To dry the rain on my storm-beaten face,
For no man well of such a salve can speak
That heals the wound and cures not the disgrace:
Nor can thy shame give physic to my grief;
Though thou repent, yet I have still the loss:
The offender's sorrow lends but weak relief
To him that bears the strong offence's cross.
Ah ! but those tears are pearl which thy love sheds,
And they are rich, and ransom all ill deeds.

XXXV

No more be grieved at that which thou hast done:
Roses have thorns, and silver fountains mud;
Clouds and eclipses stain both moon and sun,
And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud.
All men make faults, and even I in this,
Authorizing thy trespass with compare,
Myself corrupting, salving thy amiss,
Excusing thy sins more than thy sins are;
For to thy sensual fault I bring in sense —
Thy adverse party is thy advocate —
And 'gainst myself a lawful plea commence:
Such civil war is in my love and hate,
That I an accessory needs must be
To that sweet thief which sourly robs from me.

XXXVI

Let me confess that we two must be twain,
Although our undivided loves are one:
So shall those blots that do with me remain,
Without thy help, by me be borne alone.
In our two loves there is but one respect,
Though in our lives a separable spite,
Which though it alter not love's sole effect,
Yet doth it steal sweet hours from love's delight.
I may not evermore acknowledge thee,
Lest my bewailed guilt should do thee shame,
Nor thou with public kindness honour me,
Unless thou take that honour from thy name:
But do not so; I love thee in such sort,
As thou being mine, mine is thy good report.

XXXVII

As a decrepit father takes delight
To see his active child do deeds of youth,
So I, made lame by fortune's dearest spite,
Take all my comfort of thy worth and truth;
For whether beauty, birth, or wealth, or wit,
Or any of these all, or all, or more,
Entitled in thy parts do crowned sit,
I make my love engrafted to this store:
So then I am not lame, poor, nor despised,
Whilst that this shadow doth such substance give
That I in thy abundance am sufficed
And by a part of all thy glory live.
Look, what is best, that best I wish in thee:
This wish I have; then ten times happy me !

XXXVIII

How can my Muse want subject to invent,
While thou dost breathe, that pour'st into my verse
Thine own sweet argument, too excellent
For every vulgar paper to rehearse ?
O, give thyself the thanks, if aught in me
Worthy perusal stand against thy sight;
For who's so dumb that cannot write to thee,
When thou thyself dost give invention light ?
Be thou the tenth Muse, ten times more in worth
Than those old nine which rhymers invoke;
And he that calls on thee, let him bring forth
Eternal numbers to outlive long date.
If my slight Muse do please these curious days,
The pain be mine, but thine shall be the praise.

XXXIX

O, how thy worth with manners may I sing,
When thou art all the better part of me ?
What can mine own praise to mine own self bring ?
And what is't but mine own when I praise thee ?
Even for this let us divided live,
And our dear love lose name of single one,
That by this separation I may give
That due to thee which thou deservest alone.
O absence, what a torment wouldst thou prove,
Were it not thy sour leisure gave sweet leave
To entertain the time with thoughts of love,
Which time and thoughts so sweetly doth deceive,
And that thou teachest how to make one twain,
By praising him here who doth hence remain !

XL

Take all my loves, my love, yea, take them all;
What hast thou then more than thou hadst before ?
No love, my love, that thou mayst true love call;
All mine was thine before thou hadst this more.
Then, if for my love thou my love receivest,
I cannot blame thee for my love thou usest;
But yet be blamed, if thou thyself deceivest
By wilful taste of what thyself refuseth.
I do forgive thy robbery, gentle thief,
Although thou steal thee all my poverty;
And yet, love knows, it is a greater grief
To bear love's wrong than hate's known injury.
Lascivious grace, in whom all ill well shows,
Kill me with spites; yet we must not be foes.

XLI

Those pretty wrongs that liberty commits,
When I am sometime absent from thy heart,
Thy beauty and thy years full well befits,
For still temptation follows where thou art.
Gentle thou art, and therefore to be won,
Beauteous thou art, therefore to be assailed;
And when a woman woos, what woman's son
Will sourly leave her till she have prevailed ?
Ay me ! but yet thou mightst my seat forbear,
And chide thy beauty and thy straying youth,
Who lead thee in their riot even there
Where thou art forced to break a twofold truth,
Hers, by thy beauty tempting her to thee,
Thine, by thy beauty being false to me.

XLII

That thou hast her, it is not all my grief,
And yet it may be said I loved her dearly;
That she hath thee, is of my wailing chief,
A loss in love that touches me more nearly.
Loving offenders, thus I will excuse ye:
Thou dost love her, because thou know'st I love her;
And for my sake even so doth she abuse me,
Suffering my friend for my sake to approve her.
If I lose thee, my loss is my love's gain,
And losing her, my friend hath found that loss;
Both find each other, and I lose both twain,
And both for my sake lay on me this cross:
But here's the joy: my friend and I are one;
Sweet flattery ! then she loves but me alone.

XLIII

When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see,
For all the day they view things unrespected;
But when I sleep, in dreams they look on thee,
And, darkly bright, are bright in dark directed.
Then thou, whose shadow shadows doth make bright,
How would thy shadow's form form happy show
To the clear day with thy much clearer light,
When to unseeing eyes thy shade shines so !
How would, I say, mine eyes be blessed made
By looking on thee in the living day,
When in dead night thy fair imperfect shade
Through heavy sleep on sightless eyes doth stay !
All days are nights to see till I see thee,
And nights bright days when dreams do show thee me.

XLIV

If the dull substance of my flesh were thought,
Injurious distance should not stop my way;
For then, despite of space, I would be brought,
From limits far remote, where thou dost stay.
No matter then although my foot did stand
Upon the farthest earth removed from thee;
For nimble thought can jump both sea and land,
As soon as think the place where he would be.
But, ah, thought kills me, that I am not thought,
To leap large lengths of miles when thou art gone,
But that, so much of earth and water wrought,
I must attend time's leisure with my moan;
Receiving nought by elements so slow
But heavy tears, badges of either's woe.

XLV

The other two, slight air and purging fire,
Are both with thee, wherever I abide;
The first my thought, the other my desire,
These present-absent with swift motion slide.
For when these quicker elements are gone
In tender embassy of love to thee,
My life, being made of four, with two alone
Sinks down to death, oppress'd with melancholy;
Until life's composition be recured
By those swift messengers return'd from thee,
Who even but now come back again, assured
Of thy fair health, recounting it to me:
This told, I joy; but then no longer glad,
I send them back again, and straight grow sad.

XLVI

Mine eye and heart are at a mortal war,
How to divide the conquest of thy sight;
Mine eye my heart thy picture's sight would bar,
My heart mine eye the freedom of that right.
My heart doth plead that thou in him dost lie,
A closet never pierced with crystal eyes,
But the defendant doth that plea deny,
And says in him thy fair appearance lies.
To 'cide this title is impaneled
A quest of thoughts, all tenants to the heart;
And by their verdict is determined
The clear eye's moiety and the dear heart's part:
As thus; mine eye's due is thine outward part,
And my heart's right thine inward love of heart.

XLVII

Betwixt mine eye and heart a league is took,
And each doth good turns now unto the other:
When that mine eye is famish'd for a look,
Or heart in love with sighs himself doth smother,
With my love's picture then my eye doth feast
And to the painted banquet bids my heart;
Another time mine eye is my heart's guest
And in his thoughts of love doth share a part:
So, either by thy picture or my love,
Thyself away art present still with me;
For thou not farther than my thoughts canst move,
And I am still with them and they with thee;
Or, if they sleep, thy picture in my sight
Awakes my heart to heart's and eye's delight.

XLVIII

How careful was I, when I took my way,
Each trifle under truest bars to thrust,
That to my use it might unused stay
From hands of falsehood, in sure wards of trust !
But thou, to whom my jewels trifles are,
Most worthy comfort, now my greatest grief,
Thou, best of dearest and mine only care,
Art left the prey of every vulgar thief.
Thee have I not lock'd up in any chest,
Save where thou art not, though I feel thou art,
Within the gentle closure of my breast,
From whence at pleasure thou mayst come and part;
And even thence thou wilt be stol'n, I fear,
For truth proves thievish for a prize so dear.

XLIX

Against that time, if ever that time come,
When I shall see thee frown on my defects,
When as thy love hath cast his utmost sum,
Call'd to that audit by advised respects;
Against that time when thou shalt strangely pass,
And scarcely greet me with that sun, thine eye,
When love, converted from the thing it was,
Shall reasons find of settled gravity;
Against that time do I ensconce me here
Within the knowledge of mine own desert,
And this my hand against myself uprear,
To guard the lawful reasons on thy part:
To leave poor me thou hast the strength of laws,
Since why to love I can allege no cause.

L

How heavy do I journey on the way,
When what I seek, my weary travel's end,
Doth teach that ease and that repose to say,
'Thus far the miles are measured from thy friend!'
The beast that bears me, tired with my woe,
Plods dully on, to bear that weight in me,
As if by some instinct the wretch did know
His rider loved not speed, being made from thee:
The bloody spur cannot provoke him on
That sometimes anger thrusts into his hide;
Which heavily he answers with a groan,
More sharp to me than spurring to his side;
For that same groan doth put this in my mind;
My grief lies onward, and my joy behind.

LI

Thus can my love excuse the slow offence
Of my dull bearer when from thee I speed:
From where thou art why should I haste me thence?
Till I return, of posting is no need.
O, what excuse will my poor beast then find,
When swift extremity can seem but slow?
Then should I spur, though mounted on the wind,
In winged speed no motion shall I know:
Then can no horse with my desire keep pace;
Therefore desire, of perfect'st love being made,
Shall neigh — no dull flesh — in his fiery race;
But love, for love, thus shall excuse my jade;
Since from thee going he went wilful-slow,
Towards thee I'll run and give him leave to go.

LII

So am I as the rich, whose blessed key
Can bring him to his sweet up-locked treasure,
The which he will not every hour survey,
For blunting the fine point of seldom pleasure.
Therefore are feasts so solemn and so rare,
Since, seldom coming, in the long year set,
Like stones of worth they thinly placed are,
Or captain jewels in the carcanet.
So is the time that keeps you as my chest,
Or as the wardrobe which the robe doth hide,
To make some special instant special blest,
By new unfolding his imprison'd pride.
Blessed are you, whose worthiness gives scope,
Being had, to triumph, being lack'd, to hope.

LIII

What is your substance, whereof are you made,
That millions of strange shadows on you tend ?
Since every one hath, every one, one shade,
And you, but one, can every shadow lend.
Describe Adonis, and the counterfeit
Is poorly imitated after you;
On Helen's cheek all art of beauty set,
And you in Grecian tires are painted new:
Speak of the spring and foison of the year,
The one doth shadow of your beauty show,
The other as your bounty doth appear;
And you in every blessed shape we know.
In all external grace you have some part,
But you like none, none you, for constant heart.

LIV

O, how much more doth beauty beauteous seem
By that sweet ornament which truth doth give !
The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem
For that sweet odour which doth in it live.
The canker-blooms have full as deep a dye
As the perfumed tincture of the roses,
Hang on such thorns, and play as wantonly
When summer's breath their masked buds discloses:
But, for their virtue only is their show,
They live unwoo'd and unrespected fade;
Die to themselves. Sweet roses do not so;
Of their sweet deaths are sweetest odours made:
And so of you, beauteous and lovely youth,
When that shall vade, by verse distills your truth.

LV

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme ?
But you shall shine more bright in these contents
Than unswept stone, besmear'd with sluttish time.
When wasteful war shall statues overturn,
And broils root out the work of masonry,
Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn
The living record of your memory.
'Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity
Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room
Even in the eyes of all posterity
That wear this world out to the ending doom.
So, till the judgement that yourself arise,
You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.

LVI

Sweet love, renew thy force; be it not said
Thy edge should blunter be than appetite,
Which but to-day by feeding is allay'd,
To-morrow sharpen'd in his former might:
So, love, be thou; although to-day thou fill
Thy hungry eyes even till they wink with fulness,
To-morrow see again, and do not kill
The spirit of love with a perpetual dulness.
Let this sad interim like the ocean be
Which parts the shore, where two contracted new
Come daily to the banks, that, when they see
Return of love, more blest may be the view;
Or call it winter, which, being full of care,
Makes summer's welcome thrice more wish'd, more rare.

LVII

Being your slave, what should I do but tend
Upon the hours and times of your desire ?
I have no precious time at all to spend,
Nor services to do, till you require.
Nor dare I chide the world-without-end hour
Whilst I, my sovereign, watch the clock for you,
Nor think the bitterness of absence sour
When you have bid your servant once adieu;
Nor dare I question with my jealous thought
Where you may be, or your affairs suppose,
But, like a sad slave, stay and think of nought
Save, where you are how happy you make those.
So true a fool is love that in your will,
Though you do any thing, he thinks no ill.

LVIII

What god forbid that made me first your slave,
I should in thought control your times of pleasure,
Or at your hand the account of hours to crave,
Being your vassal, bound to stay your leisure !
O, let me suffer, being at your beck,
The imprison'd absence of your liberty;
And patience, tame to sufferance, bide each check,
Without accusing you of injury.
Be where you list, your charter is so strong
That you yourself may privilege your time
To what you will; to you it doth belong
Yourself to pardon of self-doing crime.
I am to wait, though waiting so be hell,
Not blame your pleasure, be it ill or well.

LIX

If there be nothing new, but that which is
Hath been before, how are our brains beguiled,
Which, labouring for invention, bear amiss
The second burthen of a former child !
O, that record could with a backward look,
Even of five hundred courses of the sun,
Show me your image in some antique book,
Since mind at first in character was done.
That I might see what the old world could say
To this composed wonder of your frame;
Whether we are mended, or whether better they,
Or whether revolution be the same.
O, sure I am, the wits of former days
To subjects worse have given admiring praise.

LX

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end;
Each changing place with that which goes before,
In sequent toil all forwards do contend.
Nativity, once in the main of light,
Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crown'd,
Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,
And Time that gave doth now his gift confound.
Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth
And delves the parallels in beauty's brow,
Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth,
And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow:
And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand,
Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

LXI

Is it thy will thy image should keep open
My heavy eyelids to the weary night ?
Dost thou desire my slumbers should be broken,
While shadows like to thee do mock my sight ?
Is it thy spirit that thou send'st from thee
So far from home into my deeds to pry,
To find out shames and idle hours in me,
The scope and tenour of thy jealousy ?
O, no ! thy love, though much, is not so great:
It is my love that keeps mine eye awake;
Mine own true love that doth my rest defeat,
To play the watchman ever for thy sake:
For thee watch I whilst thou doth wake elsewhere,
From me far off, with others all too near.

LXII

Sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye
And all my soul and all my every part;
And for this sin there is no remedy,
It is so grounded inward in my heart.
Methinks no face so gracious is as mine,
No shape so true, no truth of such account;
And for myself mine own worth do define,
As I all other in all worths surmount.
But when my glass shows me myself indeed,
Beated and chopp'd with tann'd antiquity,
Mine own self-love quite contrary I read;
Self so self-loving were iniquity.
'Tis thee, myself, that for myself I praise
Painting my age with beauty of thy days.

LXIII

Against my love shall be, as I am now,
With Time's injurious hand crush'd and o'erworn;
When hours have drain'd his blood and fill'd his brow
With lines and wrinkles; when his youthful morn
Hath travell'd on to age's steepy night,
And all those beauties whereof now he's king
Are vanishing or vanish'd out of sight,
Stealing away the treasure of his spring;
For such a time do I now fortify
Against confounding age's cruel knife,
That he shall never cut from memory
My sweet love's beauty, though my lover's life:
His beauty shall in these black lines be seen,
And they shall live, and he in them still green.

LXIV

When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced
The rich-proud cost of outworn buried age;
When sometime lofty towers I see down-razed,
And brass eternal slave to mortal rage;
When I have seen the hungry ocean gain
Advantage on the kingdom of the shore,
And the firm soil win of the watery main,
Increasing store with loss and loss with store;
When I have seen such interchange of state,
Or state itself confounded to decay;
Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminare,
That Time will come and take my love away.
This thought is as a death, which cannot choose
But weep to have that which it fears to lose.

LXV

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
But sad mortality o'er-sways their power,
How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea
Whose action is no stronger than a flower ?
O, how shall summer's honey breath hold out
Against the wreckful siege of battering days,
When rocks impregnable are not so stout,
Nor gates of steel so strong, but Time decays ?
O fearful meditation ! where, alack,
Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid ?
Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back ?
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid ?
O, none, unless this miracle have might,
That in black ink my love may still shine bright.

LXVI

Tired with all these, for restful death I cry,
As, to behold desert a beggar born,
And needy nothing trimm'd in jollity,
And purest faith unhappily forsworn,
And gilded honour shamefully misplaced,
And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,
And right perfection wrongfully disgraced,
And strength by limping sway disabled,
And art made tongue-tied by authority,
And folly, doctor-like, controlling skill,
And simple truth miscall'd simplicity,
And captive good attending captain ill:
Tired with all these, from these would I be gone,
Save that, to die, I leave my love alone.

LXVII

Ah, wherefore with infection should he live
And with his presence grace impiety,
That sin by him advantage should achieve
And lace itself with his society ?
Why should false painting imitate his cheek,
And steal dead seeing of his living hue ?
Why should poor beauty indirectly seek
Roses of shadow, since his rose is true ?
Why should he live, now Nature bankrupt is,
Beggar'd of blood to blush through lively veins ?
For she hath no exchequer now but his,
And, proud of many, lives upon his gains.
O, him she stores, to show what wealth she had
In days long since, before these last so bad.

LXVIII

Thus is his cheek the map of days outworn,
When beauty lived and died as flowers do now,
Before these bastard signs of fair were born,
Or durst inhabit on a living brow;
Before the golden tresses of the dead,
The right of sepulchres, were shorn away,
To live a second life on second head;
Ere beauty's dead fleece made another gay:
In him those holy antique hours are seen,
Without all ornament itself and true,
Making no summer of another's green,
Robbing no old to dress his beauty new;
And him as for a map doth Nature store,
To show false Art what beauty was of yore.

LXIX

Those parts of thee that the world's eye doth view
Want nothing that the thought of hearts can mend;
All tongues, the voice of souls, give thee that due,
Uttering bare truth, even so as foes commend.
Thy outward thus with outward praise is crown'd;
But those same tongues, that give thee so thine own,
In other accents do this praise confound
By seeing farther than the eye hath shown.
They look into the beauty of thy mind,
And that, in guess, they measure by thy deeds;
Then, churls, their thoughts, although their eyes were kind,
To thy fair flower add the rank smell of weeds:
But why thy odour matcheth not thy show,
The soil is this, that thou dost common grow.

LXX

That thou art blamed shall not be thy defect,
For slander's mark was ever yet the fair;
The ornament of beauty is suspect,
A crow that flies in heaven's sweetest air.
So thou be good, slander doth but approve
Thy worth the greater, being woo'd of time;
For canker vice the sweetest buds doth love,
And thou present'st a pure unstained prime.
Thou hast pass'd by the ambush of young days,
Either not assail'd, or victor being charged;
Yet this thy praise cannot be so thy praise,
To tie up envy evermore enlarged:
If some suspect of ill mask'd not thy show,
Then thou alone kingdoms of hearts shouldst owe.

LXXI

No longer mourn for me when I am dead
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
Give warning to the world that I am fled
From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell:
Nay, if you read this line, remember not
The hand that writ it; for I love you so,
That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,
If thinking on me then should make you woe.
O, if, I say, you look upon this verse
When I perhaps compounded am with clay,
Do not so much as my poor name rehearse,
But let your love even with my life decay;
Lest the wise world should look into your moan,
And mock you with me after I am gone.

LXXII

O, lest the world should task you to recite
What merit lived in me, that you should love
After my death, dear love, forget me quite,
For you in me can nothing worthy prove;
Unless you would devise some virtuous lie,
To do more for me than mine own desert,
And hang more praise upon deceased I
Than niggard truth would willingly impart:
O, lest your true love may seem false in this,
That you for love speak well of me untrue,
My name be buried where my body is,
And live no more to shame nor me nor you.
For I am shamed by that which I bring forth,
And so should you, to love things nothing worth.

LXXIII

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west;
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire,
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
Consumed with that which it was nourish'd by.
This thou perceivest, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

LXXIV

But be contented: when that fell arrest
Without all bail shall carry me away,
My life hath in this line some interest,
Which for memorial still with thee shall stay.
When thou reviewest this, thou dost review
The very part was consecrate to thee:
The earth can have but earth, which is his due;
My spirit is thine, the better part of me:
So then thou hast but lost the dregs of life,
The prey of worms, my body being dead;
The coward conquest of a wretch's knife,
Too base of thee to be remembered.
The worth of that is that which it contains,
And that is this, and this with thee remains.

LXXV

So are you to my thoughts as food to life,
Or as sweet-season'd showers are to the ground;
And for the peace of you I hold such strife
As 'twixt a miser and his wealth is found;
Now proud as an enjoyer, and anon
Doubting the filching age will steal his treasure;
Now counting best to be with you alone,
Then better'd that the world may see my pleasure:
Sometime all full with feasting on your sight,
And by and by clean starved for a look;
Possessing or pursuing no delight,
Save what is had or must from you be took.
Thus do I pine and surfeit day by day,
Or gluttoning on all, or all away.

LXXVI

Why is my verse so barren of new pride,
So far from variation or quick change ?
Why with the time do I not glance aside
To new-found methods and to compounds strange ?
Why write I still all one, ever the same,
And keep invention in a noted weed,
That every word doth almost tell my name,
Shewing their birth and where they did proceed ?
O, know, sweet love, I always write of you,
And you and love are still my argument;
So all my best is dressing old words new,
Spending again what is already spent:
For as the sun is daily new and old,
So is my love still telling what is told.

LXXVII

Thy glass will show thee how thy beauties wear,
Thy dial how thy precious minutes waste;
The vacant leaves thy mind's imprint will bear,
And of this book this learning mayst thou taste.
The wrinkles which thy glass will truly show
Of mouthed graves will give thee memory;
Thou by thy dial's shady stealth mayst know
Time's thievish progress to eternity.
Look, what thy memory cannot contain
Commit to these waste blanks, and thou shalt find
Those children nursed, deliver'd from thy brain
To take a new acquaintance of thy mind.
These offices, so oft as thou wilt look,
Shall profit thee and much enrich thy book.

LXXVIII

So oft have I invoked thee for my Muse
And found such fair assistance in my verse
As every alien pen hath got my use
And under thee their poesy disperse.
Thine eyes, that taught the dumb on high to sing
And heavy ignorance aloft to fly,
Have added feathers to the learned's wing
And given grace a double majesty.
Yet be most proud of that which I compile,
Whose influence is thine and born of thee:
In others' works thou dost but mend the style,
And arts with thy sweet graces graced be:
But thou art all my art, and dost advance
As high as learning my rude ignorance.

LXXIX

Whilst I alone did call upon thy aid,
My verse alone had all thy gentle grace;
But now my gracious numbers are decay'd,
And my sick Muse doth give another place.
I grant, sweet love, thy lovely argument
Deserves the travail of a worthier pen;
Yet what of thee thy poet doth invent
He robs thee of, and pays it thee again.
He lends thee virtue, and he stole that word
For thy behaviour; beauty doth he give,
And found it in thy cheek: he can afford
No praise to thee but what in thee doth live.
Then thank him not for that which he doth say,
Since what he owes thee thou thyself dost pay,

LXXX

O, how I faint when I of you do write,
Knowing a better spirit doth use your name,
And in the praise thereof spends all his might,
To make me tongue-tied, speaking of your fame!
But since your worth, wide as the ocean is,
The humble as the proudest sail doth bear,
My saucy bark, inferior far to his,
On your broad main doth wilfully appear.
Your shallowest help will hold me up afloat,
Whilst he upon your soundless deep doth ride;
Or, being wreck'd, I am a worthless boat,
He of tall building and of goodly pride:
Then if he thrive and I be cast away,
The worst was this; my love was my decay.

•

LXXXI

Or I shall live your epitaph to make,
Or you survive when I in earth am rotten;
From hence your memory death cannot take,
Although in me each part will be forgotten.
Your name from hence immortal life shall have,
Though I, once gone, to all the world must die:
The earth can yield me but a common grave,
When you entombed in men's eyes shall lie.
Your monument shall be my gentle verse,
Which eyes not yet created shall o'er-read;
And tongues to be your being shall rehearse,
When all the breathers of this world are dead;
You still shall live — such virtue hath my pen —
Where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men.

LXXXII

I grant thou wert not married to my Muse,
And therefore mayst without attaint o'erlook
The dedicated words which writers use
Of their fair subject, blessing every book.
Thou art as fair in knowledge as in hue,
Finding thy worth a limit past my praise;
And therefore art enforced to seek anew
Some fresher stamp of the time-bettering days,
And do so, love; yet when they have devised
What strained touches rhetoric can lend,
Thou truly fair wert truly sympathized
In true plain words by thy true-telling friend;
And their gross painting might be better used
Where cheeks need blood; in thee it is abused.

LXXXIII

I never saw that you did painting need,
And therefore to your fair no painting set;
I found, or thought I found, you did exceed
The barren tender of a poet's debt:
And therefore have I slept in your report,
That you yourself, being extant, well might show
How far a modern quill doth come too short,
Speaking of worth, what worth in you doth grow.
This silence for my sin you did impute,
Which shall be most my glory, being dumb;
For I impair not beauty being mute,
When others would give life and bring a tomb
There lives more life in one of your fair eyes
Than both your poets can in praise devise.

LXXXIV

Who is it that says most ? which can say more
Than this rich praise, that you alone are you ?
In whose confine immured is the store
Which should example where your equal grew.
Lean penury within that pen doth dwell
That to his subject lends not some small glory;
But he that writes of you, if he can tell
That you are you, so dignifies his story.
Let him but copy what in you is writ,
Not making worse what nature made so clear,
And such a counterpart shall fame his wit,
Making his style admired every where.
You to your beauteous blessings add a curse,
Being fond on praise, which makes your praises worse.

LXXXV

My tongue-tied Muse in manners holds her still,
While comments of your praise, richly compiled,
Reserve their character with golden quill,
And precious phrase by all the Muses filed.
I think good thoughts, whilst other write good words,
And, like unletter'd clerk, still cry 'Amen'
To every hymn that able spirit affords,
In polish'd form of well refined pen.
Hearing you praised, I say ' 'Tis so, 'tis true,'
And to the most of praise add something more;
But that is in my thought, whose love to you,
Though words come hindmost, holds his rank before.
Then others for the breath of words respect,
Me for my dumb thoughts, speaking in effect.

LXXXVI

Was it the proud full sail of his great verse,
Bound for the prize of all too precious you,
That did my ripe thoughts in my brain inhearse,
Making their tomb the womb wherein they grew?
Was it his spirit, by spirits taught to write
Above a mortal pitch, that struck me dead?
No, neither he, nor his compeers by night
Giving him aid, my verse astonished.
He, nor that affable familiar ghost
Which nightly gulls him with intelligence,
As victors, of my silence cannot boast;
I was not sick of any fear from thence:
But when your countenance fill'd up his line,
Then lack'd I matter; that enfeebled mine.

LXXXVII

Farewell ! thou art too dear for my possessing,
And like enough thou know'st thy estimate:
The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing;
My bonds in thee are all determinate.
For how do I hold thee but by thy granting ?
And for that riches where is my deserving ?
The cause of this fair gift in me is wanting,
And so my patent back again is swerving.
Thyself thou gavest, thy own worth then not knowing,
Or me, to whom thou gavest it, else mistaking;
So thy great gift, upon misprision growing,
Comes home again, on better judgement making.
Thus have I had thee, as a dream doth flatter,
In sleep a king, but waking no such matter.

LXXXVIII

When thou shalt be disposed to set me light,
And place my merit in the eye of scorn,
Upon thy side against myself I'll fight,
And prove thee virtuous, though thou art forsworn.
With mine own weakness being best acquainted,
Upon thy part I can set down a story
Of faults conceal'd, wherein I am attainted;
That thou in losing me shalt win much glory:
And I by this will be a gainer too;
For bending all my loving thoughts on thee,
The injuries that to myself I do,
Doing thee vantage, double-vantage me.
Such is my love, to thee I so belong,
That for thy right myself will bear all wrong.

LXXXIX

Say that thou didst forsake me for some fault,
And I will comment upon that offence:
Speak of my lameness, and I straight will halt,
Against thy reasons making no defence.
Thou canst not, love, disgrace me half so ill,
To set a form upon desired change,
As I'll myself disgrace; knowing thy will,
I will acquaintance strangle and look strange;
Be absent from thy walks; and in my tongue
Thy sweet beloved name no more shall dwell,
Lest I, too much profane, should do it wrong,
And haply of our old acquaintance tell.
For thee, against myself I'll vow debate,
For I must ne'er love him whom thou dost hate.

XC

Then hate me when thou wilt; if ever, now;
Now, while the world is bent my deeds to cross,
Join with the spite of fortune, make me bow,
And do not drop in for an after-loss:
Ah, do not, when my heart hath 'scaped this sorrow,
Come in the rearward of a conquer'd woe;
Give not a windy night a rainy morrow,
To linger out a purposed overthrow.
If thou wilt leave me, do not leave me last,
When other petty griefs have done their spite,
But in the onset come: so shall I taste
At first the very worst of fortune's might;
And other strains of woe, which now seem woe,
Compared with loss of thee will not seem so.

XCI

Some glory in their birth, some in their skill,
Some in their wealth, some in their body's force;
Some in their garments, though new-fangled ill;
Some in their hawks and hounds, some in their horse;
And every humour hath his adjunct pleasure,
Wherein it finds a joy above the rest:
But these particulars are not my measure;
All these I better in one general best.
Thy love is better than high birth to me,
Richer than wealth, prouder than garments' cost,
Of more delight than hawks or horses be;
And having thee, of all men's pride I boast:
Wretched in this alone, that thou mayst take
All this away and me most wretched make.

XCII

But do thy worst to steal thyself away,
For term of life thou art assured mine;
And life no longer than thy love will stay,
For it depends upon that love of thine.
Then need I not to fear the worst of wrongs,
When in the least of them my life hath end.
I see a better state to me belongs
Than that which on thy humour doth depend:
Thou canst not vex me with inconstant mind,
Since that my life on thy revolt doth lie.
O, what a happy title do I find,
Happy to have thy love, happy to die!
But what's so blessed-fair that fears no blot?
Thou mayst be false, and yet I know it not.

XCIII

So shall I live, supposing thou art true,
Like a deceived husband; so love's face
May still seem love to me, though alter'd new;
Thy looks with me, thy heart in other place:
For there can live no hatred in thine eye,
Therefore in that I cannot know thy change.
In many's looks the false heart's history
Is writ in moods and frowns and wrinkles strange,
But heaven in thy creation did decree
That in thy face sweet love should ever dwell;
Whate'er thy thoughts or thy heart's workings be,
Thy looks should nothing thence but sweetness tell.
How like Eve's apple doth thy beauty grow,
If thy sweet virtue answer not thy show !

XCIV

They that have power to hurt and will do none,
That do not do the thing they most do show,
Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,
Unmoved, cold and to temptation slow;
They rightly do inherit heaven's graces
And husband nature's riches from expense;
They are the lords and owners of their faces,
Others but stewards of their excellence.
The summer's flower is to the summer sweet,
Though to itself it only live and die,
But if that flower with base infection meet,
The basest weed outbraves his dignity:
For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds;
Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.

XCV

How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame
Which, like a canker in the fragrant rose,
Doth spot the beauty of thy budding name !
O, in what sweets dost thou thy sins inclose !
That tongue that tells the story of thy days,
Making lascivious comments on thy sport,
Cannot dispraise but in a kind of praise;
Naming thy name blesses an ill report.
O, what a mansion have those vices got
Which for their habitation chose out thee,
Where beauty's veil doth cover every blot
And all things turn to fair that eyes can see !
Take heed, dear heart, of this large privilege;
The hardest knife ill used doth lose his edge.

XCVI

Some say, thy fault is youth, some wantonness;
Some say, thy grace is youth and gentle sport;
Both grace and faults are loved of more and less:
Thou makest faults graces that to thee resort.
As on the finger of a throned queen
The basest jewel will be well esteem'd,
So are those errors that in thee are seen
To truths translated and for true things deem'd.
How many lambs might the stern wolf betray,
If like a lamb he could his looks translate !
How many gazers mightst thou lead away,
If thou wouldst use the strength of all thy state !
But do not so; I love thee in such sort,
As thou being mine, mine is thy good report.

XCVII

How like a winter hath my absence been
From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year !
What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen !
What old December's bareness every where !
And yet this time removed was summer's time;
The teeming autumn, big with rich increase,
Bearing the wanton burthen of the prime,
Like widowed wombs after their lord's decease:
Yet this abundant issue seem'd to me
But hope of orphans and unfather'd fruit;
For summer and his pleasures wait on thee,
And, thou away, the very birds are mute;
Or, if they sing, 'tis with so dull a cheer
That leaves look pale, dreading the winter's near.

XCVIII

From you have I been absent in the spring,
When proud-pied April, dress'd in all his trim,
Hath put a spirit of youth in every thing,
That heavy Saturn laugh'd and leap'd with him.
Yet nor the lays of birds, nor the sweet smell
Of different flowers in odour and in hue,
Could make me any summer's story tell,
Or from their proud lap pluck them where they grew:
Nor did I wonder at the lily's white,
Nor praise the deep vermilion in the rose;
They were but sweet, but figures of delight,
Drawn after you, you pattern of all those.
Yet seem'd it winter still, and, you away,
As with your shadow I with these did play.

XCIX

The forward violet thus did I chide:
Sweet thief, whence didst thou steal thy sweet that smells,
If not from my love's breath? The purple pride
Which on thy soft cheek for complexion dwells
In my love's veins thou hast too grossly dyed.
The lily I condemned for thy hand,
And buds of marjoram had stol'n thy hair;
The roses fearfully on thorns did stand,
One blushing shame, another white despair;
A third, nor red nor white, had stol'n of both,
And to his robbery had annex'd thy breath;
But, for his theft, in pride of all his growth
A vengeful canker eat him up to death.
More flowers I noted, yet I none could see
But sweet or colour it had stol'n from thee.

C

Where art thou, Muse, that thou forget'st so long
To speak of that which gives thee all thy might?
Spend'st thou thy fury on some worthless song,
Darkening thy power to lend base subjects light?
Return, forgetful Muse, and straight redeem
In gentle numbers time so idly spent;
Sing to the ear that doth thy lays esteem
And gives thy pen both skill and argument.
Rise, resty Muse, my love's sweet face survey,
If time have any wrinkle graven there;
If any, be a satire to decay,
And make Time's spoils despised every where.
Give my love fame faster than Time wastes life;
So thou preven'st his scythe and crooked knife.

CI

O truant Muse, what shall be thy amends
For thy neglect of truth in beauty dyed ?
Both truth and beauty on my love depends;
So dost thou too, and therein dignified.
Make answer, Muse: wilt thou not haply say,
‘Truth needs no colour, with his colour fix’d;
Beauty no pencil, beauty’s truth to lay;
But best is best, if never intermix’d’ ?
Because he needs no praise, wilt thou be dumb ?
Excuse not silence so, for’t lies in thee
To make him much outlive a gilded tomb
And to be praised of ages yet to be.
Then do thy office, Muse; I teach thee how
To make him seem long hence as he shows now.

CII

My love is strengthen’d, though more weak in seeming;
I love not less, though less the show appear:
That love is merchandized whose rich esteeming
The owner’s tongue doth publish every where.
Our love was new, and then but in the spring,
When I was wont to greet it with my lays;
As Philomel in summer’s front doth sing,
And stops her pipe in growth of riper days:
Not that the summer is less pleasant now
Than when her mournful hymns did hush the night,
But that wild music burthens every bough,
And sweets grown common lose their dear delight.
Therefore, like her, I sometime hold my tongue,
Because I would not dull you with my song.

CIII

Alack, what poverty my Muse brings forth,
That having such a scope to show her pride,
The argument, all bare, is of more worth
Than when it hath my added praise beside !
O, blame me not, if I no more can write !
Look in your glass, and there appears a face
That over-goes my blunt invention quite,
Dulling my lines and doing me disgrace.
Were it not sinful then, striving to mend,
To mar the subject that before was well ?
For to no other pass my verses tend
Than of your graces and your gifts to tell;
And more, much more, than in my verse can sit,
Your own glass shows you when you look in it.

CIV

To me, fair friend, you never can be old,
For as you were when first your eye I eyed,
Such seems your beauty still. Three winters cold
Have from the forests shook three summers' pride,
Three beauteous springs to yellow autumn turn'd
In process of the seasons have I seen,
Three April perfumes in three hot Junes burn'd,
Since first I saw you fresh, which yet are green.
Ah, yet doth beauty, like a dial-hand,
Steal from his figure, and no pace perceived;
So your sweet hue, which methinks still doth stand,
Hath motions, and mine eye may be deceived:
For fear of which, hear this, thou age unbred;
Ere you were born was beauty's summer dead.

CV

Let not my love be call'd idolatry,
Nor my beloved as an idol show,
Since all alike my songs and praise be
To one, of one, still such, and ever so.
Kind is my love to-day, to-morrow kind,
Still constant in a wondrous excellence;
Therefore my verse to constancy confined,
One thing expressing, leaves out difference.
'Fair, kind, and true,' is all my argument,
'Fair, kind, and true,' varying to other words;
And in this change is my invention spent,
Three themes in one, which wondrous scope affords.
'Fair, kind, and true,' have often lived alone,
Which three till now never kept seat in one.

CVI

When in the chronicle of wasted time
I see descriptions of the fairest wights,
And beauty making beautiful old rhyme
In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights,
Then, in the blazon of sweet beauty's best,
Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,
I see their antique pen would have express'd
Even such a beauty as you master now.
So all their praises are but prophecies
Of this our time, all you prefiguring;
And, for they look'd but with divining eyes,
They had not skill enough your worth to sing:
For we, which now behold these present days,
Have eyes to wonder, but lack tongues to praise.

CVII

Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul
Of the wide world dreaming on things to come,
Can yet the lease of my true love control,
Supposed as forfeit to a confined doom.
The mortal moon hath her eclipse endured,
And the sad augurs mock their own presage;
Incertainties now crown themselves assured,
And peace proclaims olives of endless age.
Now with the drops of this most balmy time
My love looks fresh, and Death to me subscribes,
Since, spite of him, I'll live in this poor rhyme,
While he insults o'er dull and speechless tribes:
And thou in this shalt find thy monument,
When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass are spent.

CVIII

What's in the brain, that ink may character,
Which hath not figured to thee my true spirit ?
What's new to speak, what new to register,
That may express my love, or thy dear merit ?
Nothing, sweet boy; but yet, like prayers divine,
I must each day say o'er the very same;
Counting no old thing old, thou mine, I thine,
Even as when first I hallowed thy fair name.
So that eternal love in love's fresh case
Weighs not the dust and injury of age,
Nor gives to necessary wrinkles place,
But makes antiquity for aye his page;
Finding the first conceit of love there bred,
Where time and outward form would show it dead.

CIX

O, never say that I was false of heart,
Though absence seem'd my flame to qualify.
As easy might I from myself depart
As from my soul, which in thy breast doth lie:
That is my home of love: if I have ranged,
Like him that travels, I return again;
Just to the time, not with the time exchanged,
So that myself bring water for my stain.
Never believe, though in my nature reign'd
All frailties that besiege all kinds of blood,
That it could so preposterously be stain'd,
To leave for nothing all thy sum of good;
For nothing this wide universe I call,
Save thou, my rose; in it thou art my all.

CX

Alas, 'tis true I have gone here and there,
And made myself a motley to the view,
Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear,
Made old offences of affections new;
Most true it is that I have look'd on truth
Askance and strangely: but, by all above,
These blenches gave my heart another youth,
And worse essays proved thee my best of love.
Now all is done, have what shall have no end:
Mine appetite I never more will grind
On newer proof, to try an older friend,
A god in love, to whom I am confined.
Then give me welcome, next my heaven the best,
Even to thy pure and most most loving breast.

CXI

O, for my sake do you with Fortune chide,
The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
That did not better for my life provide
Than public means which public manners breeds.
Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
And almost thence my nature is subdued
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand:
Pity me then and wish I were renew'd;
Whilst, like a willing patient, I will drink
Potions of eisel 'gainst my strong infection;
No bitterness that I will bitter think,
Nor double penance, to correct correction.
Pity me then, dear friend, and I assure ye
Even that your pity is enough to cure me.

CXII

Your love and pity doth the impression fill
Which vulgar scandal stamp'd upon my brow;
For what care I who calls me well or ill,
So you o'er-green my bad, my good allow?
You are my all the world, and I must strive
To know my shames and praises from your tongue;
None else to me, nor I to none alive,
That my steel'd sense or changes right or wrong.
In so profound abysm I throw all care
Of others' voices, that my adder's sense
To critic and to flatterer stopped are.
Mark how with my neglect I do dispense:
You are so strongly in my purpose bred
That all the world besides methinks are dead.

CXIII

Since I left you mine eye is in my mind,
And that which governs me to go about
Doth part his function and is partly blind,
Seems seeing, but effectually is out;
For it no form delivers to the heart
Of bird, of flower, or shape, which it doth latch:
Of his quick object hath the mind no part,
Nor his own vision holds what it doth catch;
For if it see the rudest or gentlest sight,
The most sweet favour or deformed'st creature,
The mountain or the sea, the day or night,
The crow or dove, it shapes them to your feature:
Incapable of more, replete with you,
My most true mind thus maketh mine untrue.

CXIV

Or whether doth my mind, being crown'd with you,
Drink up the monarch's plague, this flattery?
Or whether shall I say, mine eye saith true,
And that your love taught it this alchemy,
To make of monsters and things indigest
Such cherubins as your sweet self resemble,
Creating every bad a perfect best,
As fast as objects to his beams assemble?
O, 'tis the first; 'tis flattery in my seeing,
And my great mind most kingly drinks it up:
Mine eye well knows what with his gust is 'greeing,
And to his palate doth prepare the cup:
If it be poison'd, 'tis the lesser sin
That mine eye loves it and doth first begin.

CXV

Those lines that I before have writ do lie,
Even those that said I could not love you dearer:
Yet then my judgement knew no reason why
My most full flame should afterwards burn clearer.
But reckoning Time, whose million'd accidents
Creep in 'twixt vows, and change decrees of kings,
Tan sacred beauty, blunt the sharp'st intents,
Divert strong minds to the course of altering things;
Alas, why, fearing of Time's tyranny,
Might I not then say 'Now I love you best,'
When I was certain o'er uncertainty,
Crowning the present, doubting of the rest ?
Love is a babe; then might I not say so,
To give full growth to that which still doth grow ?

CXVI

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O, no ! it is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

CXVII

Accuse me thus: that I have scanted all
Wherein I should your great deserts repay.
Forgot upon your dearest love to call,
Whereto all bonds do tie me day by day;
That I have frequent been with unknown minds,
And given to time your own dear-purchased right;
That I have hoisted sail to all the winds
Which should transport me farthest from your sight.
Book both my wilfulness and errors down,
And on just proof surmise accumulate;
Bring me within the level of your frown,
But shoot not at me in your waken'd hate;
Since my appeal says I did strive to prove
The constancy and virtue of your love.

CXVIII

Like as, to make our appetites more keen,
With eager compounds we our palate urge;
As, to prevent our maladies unseen,
We sicken to shun sickness when we purge;
Even so, being full of your ne'er-cloying sweetness,
To bitter sauces did I frame my feeding;
And sick of welfare found a kind of meetness
To be diseased, ere that there was true needing.
Thus policy in love, to anticipate
The ills that were not, grew to faults assured,
And brought to medicine a healthful state,
Which, rank of goodness, would by ill be cured:
But thence I learn, and find the lesson true,
Drugs poison him that so fell sick of you.

CXIX

What potions have I drunk of Siren tears,
Distill'd from limbecks fowl as hell within,
Applying fears to hopes and hopes to fears,
Still losing when I saw myself to win !
What wretched errors hath my heart committed,
Whilst it hath thought itself so blessed never !
How have mine eyes out of their spheres been fitted,
In the distraction of this madding fever !
O benefit of ill ! now I find true
That better is by evil still made better ;
And ruin'd love, when it is built anew,
Grows fairer than at first, more strong, far greater.
So I return rebuked to my content,
And gain by ill thrice more than I have spent.

CXX

That you were once unkind befriends me now,
And for that sorrow which I then did feel
Needs must I under my transgression bow,
Unless my nerves were brass or hammer'd steel.
For if you were by my unkindness shaken,
As I by yours, you've pass'd a hell of time ;
And I, a tyrant, have no leisure taken
To weigh how once I suffer'd in your crime.
O, that our night of woe might have remember'd
My deepest sense, how hard true sorrow hits,
And soon to you, as you to me, then tender'd
The humble salve which wounded bosoms fits !
But that your trespass now becomes a fee ;
Mine ransoms yours, and yours must ransom me.

CXXI

'Tis better to be vile than vile esteemed,
When not to be receives reproach of being;
And the just pleasure lost, which is so deemed
Not by our feeling, but by others' seeing:
For why should others' false adulterate eyes
Give salutation to my sportive blood?
Or on my frailties why are frailer spies,
Which in their wills count bad what I think good?
No, I am that I am, and they that level
At my abuses reckon up their own:
I may be straight, though they themselves be bevel;
By their rank thoughts my deeds must not be shown;
Unless this general evil they maintain,
All men are bad and in their badness reign.

CXXII

Thy gift, thy tables, are within my brain
Full character'd with lasting memory,
Which shall above that idle rank remain,
Beyond all date, even to eternity:
Or, at the least, so long as brain and heart
Have faculty by nature to subsist;
Till each to razed oblivion yield his part
Of thee, thy record never can be miss'd.
That poor retention could not so much hold,
Nor need I tallies thy dear love to score;
Therefore to give them from me was I bold,
To trust those tables that receive thee more:
To keep an adjunct to remember thee
Were to import forgetfulness in me.

CXXIII

No, time, thou shalt not boast that I do change:
Thy pyramids built up with newer might
To me are nothing novel, nothing strange;
They are but dressings of a former sight.
Our dates are brief, and therefore we admire
What thou dost foist upon us that is old;
And rather make them born to our desire
Than think that we before have heard them told.
Thy registers and thee I both defy,
Not wondering at the present nor the past,
For thy records and what we see doth lie,
Made more or less by thy continual haste.
This I do vow, and this shall ever be,
I will be true, despite thy scythe and thee.

CXXIV

If my dear love were but the child of state,
It might for Fortune's bastard be unfather'd,
As subject to Time's love or to Time's hate,
Weeds among weeds, or flowers with flowers gather'd.
No, it was builded far from accident;
It suffers not in smiling pomp, nor falls
Under the blow of thrall'd discontent,
Whereto the inviting time our fashion calls:
It fears not policy, that heretic,
Which works on leases of short-number'd hours.
But all alone stands hugely politic,
That it nor grows with heat nor drowns with showers
To this I witness call the fools of time,
Which die for goodness, who have lived for crime.

CXXV

Were't aught to me I bore the canopy,
With my extern the outward honouring,
Or laid great bases for eternity,
Which prove more short than waste or ruining ?
Have I not seen dwellers on form and favour
Lose all, and more, by paying too much rent,
For compound sweet forgoing simple savour,
Pitiful thrivers, in their gazing spent ?
No, let me be obsequious in thy heart,
And take thou my oblation, poor but free,
Which is not mix'd with seconds, knows no art
But mutual render, only me for thee.
Hence, thou suborn'd informer ! a true soul
When most impeach'd stands least in thy control.

CXXVI

O Thou, my lovely boy, who in thy power
Dost hold Time's fickle glass, his sickle, hour;
Who hast by waning grown, and therein show'st
Thy lovers withering as thy sweet self grow'st;
If Nature, sovereign mistress over wrack,
As thou goest onwards, still will pluck thee back,
She keeps thee to this purpose, that her skill
May time disgrace and wretched minutes kill.
Yet fear her, O thou minion of her pleasure !
She may detain, but not still keep, her treasure:
Her audit, though delay'd, answer'd must be
And her quietus is to render thee.

CXXVII

In the old age black was not counted fair,
Or if it were, it bore not beauty's name;
But now is black beauty's successive heir,
And beauty slander'd with a bastard shame:
For since each hand hath put on nature's power,
Fairing the foul with art's false borrow'd face,
Sweet beauty hath no name, no holy bower,
But is profaned, if not lives in disgrace.
Therefore my mistress' eyes are raven black,
Her eyes so suited, and they mourners seem
At such who, not born fair, no beauty lack,
Slandering creation with a false esteem:
Yet so they mourn, becoming of their woe,
That every tongue says beauty should look so.

CXXVIII

How oft, when thou, my music, music play'st,
Upon that blessed wood whose motion sounds
With thy sweet fingers, when thou gently sway'st
The wiry concord that mine ear confounds,
Do I envy those jacks that nimble leap
To kiss the tender inward of thy hand,
Whilst my poor lips, which should that harvest reap,
At the wood's boldness by thee blushing stand
To be so tickled, they would change their state
And situation with those dancing chips,
O'er whom thy fingers walk with gentle gait,
Making dead wood more blest than living lips.
Since saucy jacks so happy are in this,
Give them thy fingers, me thy lips to kiss.

CXXIX

The expense of spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in action; and till action, lust
Is perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame,
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;
Enjoy'd no sooner but despised straight;
Past reason hunted; and no sooner had,
Past reason hated, as a swallowed bait,
On purpose laid to make the taker mad:
Mad in pursuit, and in possession so;
Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;
A bliss in proof, and proved, a very woe;
Before, a joy proposed; behind, a dream.
All this the world well knows; yet none knows well
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

CXXX

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red:
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound:
I grant I never saw a goddess go,
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

CXXXI

Thou art as tyrannous, so as thou art,
As those whose beauties proudly make them cruel;
For well thou know'st to my dear dotting heart
Thou art the fairest and most precious jewel.
Yet, in good faith, some say that thee behold,
Thy face hath not the power to make love groan:
To say they err I dare not be so bold,
Although I swear it to myself alone.
And to be sure that is not false I swear,
A thousand groans, but thinking on thy face,
One on another's neck, do witness bear
Thy black is fairest in my judgement's place.
In nothing art thou black save in thy deeds,
And thence this slander, as I think, proceeds.

CXXXII

Thine eyes I love, and they, as pitying me,
Knowing thy heart torments me with disdain,
Have put on black and loving mourners be,
Looking with pretty ruth upon my pain.
And truly not the morning sun of heaven
Better becomes the grey cheeks of the east,
Nor that full star that ushers in the even
Doth half that glory to the sober west,
As those two mourning eyes become thy face:
O, let it then as well beseem thy heart
To mourn for me, since mourning doth thee grace,
And suit thy pity like in every part.
Then will I swear beauty herself is black,
And all they foul that thy complexion lack.

CXXXIII

Beshrew that heart that makes my heart to groan
For that deep wound it gives my friend and me !
Is't not enough to torture me alone,
But slave to slavery my sweet'st friend must be ?
Me from myself thy cruel eye hath taken,
And my next self thou harder hast engrossed:
Of him, myself, and thee, I am forsaken;
A torment thrice threefold thus to be crossed.
Prison my heart in thy steel bosom's ward,
But then my friend's heart let my poor heart bail;
Whoe'er keeps me, let my heart be his guard;
Thou canst not then use rigour in my gaol:
And yet thou wilt; for I, being pent in thee,
Perforce am thine, and all that is in me.

CXXXIV

So, now I have confess'd that he is thine
And I myself am mortgaged to thy will,
Myself I'll forfeit, so that other mine
Thou wilt restore, to be my comfort still:
But thou wilt not, nor he will not be free,
For thou art covetous and he is kind;
He learn'd but surety-like to write for me,
Under that bond that him as fast doth bind.
The statute of thy beauty thou wilt take,
Thou usurer, that put'st forth all to use,
And sue a friend came debtor for my sake;
So him I lose through my unkind abuse.
Him have I lost; thou hast both him and me:
He pays the whole, and yet am I not free.

CXXXV

Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy 'Will,'
And 'Will' to boot, and 'Will' in overplus;
More than enough am I that vex thee still,
To thy sweet will making addition thus.
Wilt thou, whose will is large and spacious,
Not once vouchsafe to hide my will in thine?
Shall will in others seem right gracious,
And in my will no fair acceptance shine?
The sea, all water, yet receives rain still,
And in abundance addeth to his store;
So thou, being rich in 'Will,' add to thy 'Will'
One will of mine, to make thy large 'Will' more.
Let no unkind, no fair beseechers kill;
Think all but one, and me in that one 'Will.'

CXXXVI

If thy soul check thee that I come so near,
Swear to thy blind soul that I was thy 'Will,'
And will, thy soul knows, is admitted there;
Thus far for love, my love-suit, sweet, fulfil.
'Will' will fulfil the treasure of thy love,
Ay, fill it full with wills, and my will one.
In things of great receipt with ease we prove
Among a number one is reckon'd none:
Then in the number let me pass untold,
Though in thy store's account I one must be;
For nothing hold me, so it please thee hold
That nothing me, a something sweet to thee:
Make but my name thy love, and love that still,
And then thou lovest me, for my name is 'Will.'

CXXXVII

Thou blind fool, Love, what dost thou to mine eyes,
That they behold, and see not what they see ?
They know what beauty is, see where it lies,
Yet what the best is take the worst to be.
If eyes, corrupt by over-partial looks,
Be anchor'd in the bay where all men ride,
Why of eyes' falsehood hast thou forged hooks,
Whereto the judgement of my heart is tied ?
Why should my heart think that a several plot
Which my heart knows the wide world's common place ?
Or mine eyes seeing this, say this is not,
To put fair truth upon so foul a face ?
In things right true my heart and eyes have erred,
And to this false plague are they now transferred.

CXXXVIII

When my love swears that she is made of truth,
I do believe her, though I know she lies,
That she might think me some untutor'd youth,
Unlearned in the world's false subtleties.
Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,
Although she knows my days are past the best,
Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue:
On both sides thus is simple truth suppress'd.
But wherefore says she not she is unjust ?
And wherefore say not I that I am old ?
O, love's best habit is in seeming trust,
And age in love loves not to have years told:
Therefore I lie with her and she with me,
And in our faults by lies we flatter'd be.

CXXXIX

O call not me to justify the wrong
That thy unkindness lays upon my heart;
Wound me not with thine eye, but with thy tongue;
Use power with power, and slay me not by art.
Tell me thou lovest elsewhere; but in my sight,
Dear heart, forbear to glance thine eye aside:
What need'st thou wound with cunning, when thy might
Is more than my o'er-pressed defence can bide?
Let me excuse thee: ah, my love well knows
Her pretty looks have been mine enemies;
And therefore from my face she turns my foes,
That they elsewhere might dart their injuries:
Yet do not so; but since I am near slain,
Kill me outright with looks, and rid my pain.

CXL

Be wise as thou art cruel; do not press
My tongue-tied patience with too much disdain;
Lest sorrow lend me words, and words express
The manner of my pity-wanting pain.
If I might teach thee wit, better it were,
Though not to love, yet, love, to tell me so;
As testy sick men, when their deaths be near,
No news but health from their physicians know;
For, if I should despair, I should grow mad,
And in my madness might speak ill of thee:
Now this ill-wresting world is grown so bad,
Mad slanderers by mad ears believed be.
That I may not be so, nor thou belied,
Bear thine eyes straight, though thy proud heart go wide.

CXLI

In faith, I do not love thee with mine eyes,
For they in thee a thousand errors note;
But 'tis my heart that loves what they despise,
Who, in despite of view, is pleased to dote;
Nor are mine ears with thy tongue's tune delighted;
Nor tender feeling, to base touches prone,
Nor taste, nor smell, desire to be invited
To any sensual feast with thee alone:
But my five wits nor my five senses can
Dissuade one foolish heart from serving thee,
Who leaves unsway'd the likeness of a man,
Thy proud heart's slave and vassal wretch to be:
Only my plague thus far I count my gain,
That she that makes me sin awards me pain.

CXLII

Love is my sin, and thy dear virtue hate,
Hate of my sin, grounded on sinful loving:
O, but with mine compare thou thine own state,
And thou shalt find it merits not reproving;
Or, if it do, not from those lips of thine,
That have profaned their scarlet ornaments
And seal'd false bonds of love as oft as mine,
Robb'd others' beds' revenues of their rents.
Be it lawful I love thee, as thou lovest those
Whom thine eyes woo as mine importune thee:
Root pity in thy heart, that, when it grows,
Thy pity may deserve to pitied be.
If thou dost seek to have what thou dost hide,
By self-example mayst thou be denied!

CXLIII

Lo, as a careful housewife runs to catch
One of her feather'd creatures broke away,
Sets down her babe, and makes all swift dispatch
In pursuit of the thing she would have stay;
Whilst her neglected child holds her in chase,
Cries to catch her whose busy care is bent
To follow that which flies before her face,
Not prizing her poor infant's discontent:
So runn'st thou after that which flies from thee,
Whilst I thy babe chase thee afar behind;
But if thou catch thy hope, turn back to me,
And play the mother's part, kiss me, be kind:
So will I pray that thou mayst have thy 'Will,'
If thou turn back and my loud crying still.

CXLIV

Two loves I have of comfort and despair,
Which like two spirits do suggest me still:
The better angel is a man right fair,
The worser spirit a woman colour'd ill.
To win me soon to hell, my female evil
Tempteth my better angel from my side,
And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,
Wooing his purity with her foul pride.
And whether that my angel be turn'd fiend
Suspect I may, yet not directly tell;
But being both from me, both to each friend,
I guess one angel in another's hell:
Yet this shall I ne'er know, but live in doubt,
Till my bad angel fire my good one out.

CXLV

Those lips that Love's own hand did make
Breathed forth the sound that said 'I hate,'
To me that languish'd for her sake:
But when she saw my woeful state,
Straight in her heart did mercy come,
Chiding that tongue that ever sweet
Was used in giving gentle doom;
And taught it thus anew to greet;
'I hate' she alter'd with an end,
That follow'd it as gentle day
Doth follow night, who, like a fiend,
From heaven to hell is flown away;
'I hate' from hate away she threw,
And saved my life, saying 'not you.'

CXLVI

Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth,
. . . these rebel powers that thee array,
Why dost thou pine within and suffer dearth,
Painting thy outward walls so costly gay ?
Why so large cost, having so short a lease,
Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend ?
Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,
Eat up thy charge ? is this thy body's end ?
Then, soul, live thou upon thy servant's loss,
And let that pine to aggravate thy store;
Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross;
Within be fed, without be rich no more:
So shalt thou feed on Death, that feeds on men,
And Death once dead, there's no more dying then.

CXLVII

My love is as a fever, longing still
For that which longer nurseth the disease;
Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill,
The uncertain sickly appetite to please.
My reason, the physician to my love,
Angry that his prescriptions are not kept,
Hath left me, and I desperate now approve
Desire is death, which physic did except.
Past cure I am, now reason is past care,
And frantic-mad with evermore unrest;
My thoughts and my discourse as madmen's are,
At random from the truth vainly express'd;
For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright,
Who art as black as hell, as dark as night.

CXLVIII

O, me, what eyes hath Love put in my head,
Which have no correspondence with true sight !
Or, if they have, where is my judgement fled,
That censures falsely what they see aright ?
If that be fair whereon my false eyes dote,
What means the world to say it is not so ?
If it be not, then love doth well denote
Love's eye is not so true as all men's: no,
How can it ? O, how can Love's eye be true,
That is so vex'd with watching and with tears ?
No, marvel then, though I mistake my view;
The sun itself sees not till heaven clears.
O cunning Love ! with tears thou keep'st me blind,
Lest eyes well-seeing thy foul faults should find.

CXLIX

Canst thou, O cruel ! say I love thee not,
When I against myself with thee partake ?
Do I not think on thee, when I forgot
Am of myself, all tyrant, for thy sake ?
Who hateth thee that I do call my friend ?
On whom frown'st thou that I do fawn upon ?
Nay, if thou lour'st on me, do I not spend
Revenge upon myself with present moan ?
What merit do I in myself respect,
That is so proud thy service to despise,
When all my best doth worship thy defect,
Commanded by the motion of thine eyes ?
But, love, hate on, for now I know thy mind;
Those that can see thou lovest, and I am blind.

CL

O, from what power hast thou this powerful might
With insufficiency my heart to sway ?
To make me give the lie to my true sight,
And swear that brightness doth not grace the day ?
Whence hast thou this becoming of things ill,
That in the very refuse of thy deeds
There is such strength and warrantise of skill,
That, in my mind, thy worst all best exceeds ?
Who taught thee how to make me love thee more,
The more I hear and see just cause of hate ?
O, though I love what others do abhor,
With others thou shouldst not abhor my state:
If thy unworthiness raised love in me,
More worthy I to be beloved of thee.

CLI

Love is too young to know what conscience is;
Yet who knows not conscience is born of love ?
Then, gentle cheater, urge not my amiss,
Lest guilty of my faults thy sweet self prove:
For, thou betraying me, I do betray
My nobler part to my gross body's treason;
My soul doth tell my body that he may
Triumph in love; flesh stays no farther reason,
But rising at thy name doth point out thee
As his triumphant prize. Proud of this pride,
He is contented thy poor drudge to be,
To stand in thy affairs, fall by thy side.
No want of conscience hold it that I call
Her 'love' for whose dear love I rise and fall.

CLII

In loving thee thou know'st I am forsworn,
But thou art twice forsworn, to me love swearing;
In act thy bed-vow broke, and new faith torn,
In vowing new hate after new love bearing.
But why of two oaths' breach do I accuse thee,
When I break twenty ! I am perjured most;
For all my vows are oaths but to misuse thee,
And all my honest faith in thee is lost:
For I have sworn deep oaths of thy deep kindness,
Oaths of thy love, thy truth, thy constancy;
And, to enlighten thee, gave eyes to blindness,
Or made them swear against the thing they see;
For I have sworn thee fair; more perjured I,
To swear against the truth so foul a lie !

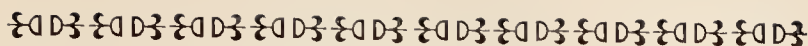
CLIII ¹

Cupid laid by his brand and fell asleep:
A maid of Dian's this advantage found,
And his love-kindling fire did quickly steep
In a cold valley-fountain of that ground;
Which borrow'd from this holy fire of Love
A dateless lively heat, still to endure,
And grew a seething bath, which yet men prove
Against strange maladies a sovereign cure.
But at my mistress' eye Love's brand new-fired,
The boy for trial needs would touch my breast;
I, sick withal, the help of bath desired,
And thither hied, a sad distemper'd guest,
But found no cure: the bath for my help lies
Where Cupid got new fire, my mistress' eyes.

CLIV

The little Love-god lying once asleep
Laid by his side his heart-inflaming brand,
Whilst many nymphs that vow'd chaste life to keep
Came tripping by; but in her maiden hand
The fairest votary took up that fire
Which many legions of true hearts had warm'd;
And so the general of hot desire
Was sleeping by a virgin hand disarm'd.
This brand she quenched in a cool well by,
Which from Love's fire took heat perpetual,
Growing a bath and healthful remedy
For men diseased; but I, my mistress' thrall,
Came there for cure, and this by that I prove.
Love's fire heats water, water cools not love.

¹ The sequence ends with the preceding sonnet. The two following are paraphrases of a Greek epigram of the fifth century, which had been translated into Latin in the sixteenth.



III—JOHN DONNE

[1573-1631]

IN THE last decade of the sixteenth century thousands of mellifluous lyrics poured from the throats of English poets while young Jack Donne, almost entirely alone, sang in caustic, jagged accents.

*I sing not, siren-like, to tempt, for I
Am harsh.*

As full-blooded and brilliant as the best of his contemporaries, he lacked their solid satisfaction, their general confidence. His mind was a turmoil of precocious erudition—of the Latin fathers, Spanish mysticism, jurisprudence, and the new physics of Copernicus and Galileo. He hung impatiently between the Catholicism which he had abandoned and the Protestantism which he could not yet accept. He was a sensualist, with the saint's suspicion of the flesh. He was a scholar, desperately curious of the crude elements of life, and he sought them out with sardonic recklessness.

When he was twenty-four, Donne sailed with an English fleet to intercept the Spanish plate-ships off the Azores. During "a stupid calm" after a severe storm, he wrote to his best friend:

*Whether a rotten state and hope of gain,
Or to disuse me from the queasy pain
Of being beloved and loving, or the thirst
Of honour or fair death, out-push'd me first,
I lose my end; for here, as well as I,
A desperate may live, and coward die.*

On returning to England Donne became private secretary to Sir Thomas Egerton, the Lord Keeper, and re-

mained in excellent standing until five years later, when he eloped with his employer's favorite niece. In consequence, he was thrown into prison for a short time and for some years afterward the young couple, with a rapidly increasing family, lived on the edge of poverty. But they were utterly devoted to one another and she brought out in him a tenderness and loyalty foreign to the hard songs of his earlier days. While waiting for a secular preferment, he drained himself with study, prepared long, controversial essays against the Catholics, and brooded endlessly on death. He had come round to the view that all religious sects possessed an element of the truth and that in the circumstances he could rightly embrace Anglicanism.

At length convinced that no worldly office was forthcoming, he yielded to the urgent request of the king and in 1615 took holy orders. He distinguished himself at once as royal chaplain and was soon preaching triumphantly to the benchers at Lincoln's Inn. In his early forties, comparatively late for such a genius, he was thus starting on his great career, when suddenly his beloved wife died and he was left prostrate. "Now his very soul was elemented of nothing but sadness; now grief took so full a possession of his heart as to leave no place for joy." Broken, inconsolable, he gave himself up to God in a dark fury of devotion.

The year after his wife's death Donne wrote his nineteen *Holy Sonnets*, a sequence closely knit in thought and mood. They exhibit all the peculiarities of his early poetry, with involved subtleties, "metaphysical" wit, and naturalistic phraseology. They show him changed not in temper but in aim. He had turned from roistering, and fair bodies to the Eternal Bread of Life. He was soon to become Dean of St. Paul's and begin his long series of sermons, perhaps the most eloquent and moving in the history of the Church of England.

HOLY SONNETS

I

Thou hast made me, and shall Thy work decay ?
Repair me now, for now mine end doth haste;
I run to death, and Death meets me as fast,
And all my pleasures are like yesterday.
I dare not move my dim eyes any way;
Despair behind, and Death before doth cast
Such terror, and my feeble flesh doth waste
By sin in it, which it towards hell doth weigh.
Only Thou art above, and when towards Thee
By Thy leave I can look, I rise again;
But our old subtle foe so tempteth me,
That not one hour myself I can sustain.
Thy grace may wing me to prevent his art
And thou like adamant draw mine iron heart.

II

As due by many titles I resign
Myself to thee, O God. First I was made
By Thee; and for Thee, and when I was decay'd
Thy blood bought that, the which before was Thine.
I am Thy son, made with Thyself to shine,
Thy servant, whose pains Thou hast still repaid,
Thy sheep, Thine image, and — till I betray'd
Myself — a temple of Thy Spirit divine.
Why doth the devil then usurp on me ?
Why doth he steal, nay ravish, that's Thy right ?
Except Thou rise and for Thine own work fight,
O ! I shall soon despair, when I shall see
That Thou lovest mankind well, yet wilt not choose me,
And Satan hates me, yet is loth to lose me.

III

O ! might those sighs and tears return again
Into my breast and eyes, which I have spent,
That I might in this holy discontent
Mourn with some fruit, as I have mourn'd in vain.
In mine idolatry what showers of rain
Mine eyes did waste ? what griefs my heart did rent ?
That sufferance was my sin, I now repent;
'Cause I did suffer, I must suffer pain.
Th' hydroptic drunkard, and night-scouting thief,
The itchy lecher, and self-tickling proud
Have the remembrance of past joys, for relief
Of coming ills. To poor me is allow'd
No ease; for long, yet vehement grief hath been
Th' effect and cause, the punishment and sin.

IV

O, my black soul, now thou art summoned
By sickness, Death's herald and champion;
Thou'rt like a pilgrim, which abroad hath done
Treason, and durst not turn to whence he's fled;
Or like a thief, which till death's doom be read,
Wisheth himself deliver'd from prison,
But damn'd and haled to execution,
Wisheth that still he might be imprisoned.
Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lack;
But who shall give thee that grace to begin ?
O, make thyself with holy mourning black,
And red with blushing, as thou art with sin;
Or wash thee in Christ's blood, which hath this might,
That being red, it dyes red souls to white.

V

I am a little world made cunningly
Of elements, and an angelic sprite;
But black sin hath betray'd to endless night
My world's both parts, and, O, both parts must die.
You which beyond that heaven which was most high
Have found new spheres, and of new land can write,
Pour new seas in my eyes, that so I might
Drown my world with my weeping earnestly,
Or wash it if it must be drown'd no more.
But, O, it must be burnt; alas ! the fire
Of lust and envy burnt it heretofore,
And made it fouler; let their flames retire,
And burn me, O Lord, with a fiery zeal
Of Thee and Thy house, which doth in eating heal.

VI

This is my play's last scene; here heavens appoint
My pilgrimage's last mile; and my race
Idly, yet quickly run, hath this last pace;
My span's last inch, my minutes' latest point;
And gluttonous Death will instantly unjoint
My body and soul, and I shall sleep a space;
But my ever-waking part shall see that face,
Whose fear already shakes my every joint.
Then, as my soul to heaven her first seat takes flight,
And earth-born body in the earth shall dwell,
So fall my sins, that all may have their right,
To where they're bred and would press me to hell.
Impute me righteous, thus purged of evil,
For thus I leave the world, the flesh, the devil,

VII

At the round earth's imagined corners blow
Your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise
From death, you numberless infinities
Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go;
All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow,
All whom war, death, age, agues, tyrannies,
Despair, law, chance hath slain, and you, whose eyes
Shall behold God, and never taste death's woe.
But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space;
For, if above all these my sins abound,
'Tis late to ask abundance of Thy grace,
When we are there. Here on this lowly ground,
Teach me how to repent, for that's as good
As if Thou hadst seal'd my pardon with Thy blood.

VIII

If faithful souls be alike glorified
As angels, then my father's soul doth see,
And adds this even to full felicity,
That valiantly I hell's wide mouth o'erstride.
But if our minds to these souls be descried
By circumstances, and by signs that be
Apparent in us not immediately,
How shall my mind's white truth by them be tried?
They see idolatrous lovers weep and mourn,
And stile blasphemous conjurers to call
On Jesu's name, and pharisaical
Dissemblers feign devotion. Then turn,
O pensive soul, to God, for He knows best
Thy grief, for He put it into my breast.

IX

If poisonous minerals, and if that tree,
Whose fruit threw death on (else immortal) us,
If lecherous goats, if serpents envious
Cannot be damn'd, alas ! why should I be ?
Why should intent or reason, born in me,
Make sins, else equal, in me more heinous ?
And, mercy being easy, and glorious
To God, in His stern wrath why threatens He ?
But who am I, that dare dispute with Thee ?
O God, O ! of Thine only worthy blood,
And my tears, make a heavenly Lethean flood,
And drown in it my sin's black memory.
That Thou remember them, some claim as debt;
I think it mercy if Thou wilt forget.

X

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those, whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy picture be,
Much pleasure, then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to Fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy, or charms can make us sleep as well,
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then ?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And Death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

XI

Spit in my face, you Jews, and pierce my side,
Buffet, and scoff, scourge, and crucify me,
For I have sinn'd, and sinn'd, and only He,
Who could do no iniquity, hath died.
But by my death can not be satisfied
My sins, which pass the Jews' impiety.
They kill'd once an inglorious man, but I
Crucify him daily, being now glorified.
O let me then His strange love still admire;
Kings pardon, but He bore our punishment;
And Jacob came clothed in vile harsh attire,
But to supplant, and with gainful intent;
God clothed Himself in vile man's flesh, that so
He might be weak enough to suffer woe.

XII

Why are we by all creatures waited on ?
Why do the prodigal elements supply
Life and food to me, being more pure than I,
Simpler and further from corruption ?
Why brook'st thou, ignorant horse, subjection ?
Why dost thou, bull and boar, so sillily
Dissemble weakness, and by one man's stroke die,
Whose whole kind you might swallow and feed upon ?
Weaker I am, woe's me, and worse than you;
You have not sinn'd, nor need be timorous.
But wonder at a greater, for to us
Created nature doth these things subdue;
But their Creator, whom sin, nor nature tied,
For us, His creatures, and His foes, hath died.

XIII

What if this present were the world's last night ?
Mark in my heart, O soul, where thou dost dwell,
The picture of Christ crucified, and tell
Whether His countenance can thee affright.
Tears in His eyes quench the amazing light;
Blood fills his frowns, which from His pierced head fell;
And can that tongue adjudge thee unto hell,
Which pray'd forgiveness for His woe's fierce spite ?
No, no; but as in my idolatry
I said to all my profane mistresses,
Beauty of pity, foulness only is
A sign of rigour; so I say to thee,
To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assign'd;
This beauteous form assumes a piteous mind.

XIV

Batter my heart, three-person'd God; for you
As yet but knock; breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force, to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
I, like an usurp'd town, to another due,
Labour to admit you, but O, to no end.
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,
But am betroth'd unto your enemy;
Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

XV

Wilt thou love God as He thee ? then digest,
My soul, this wholesome meditation,
How God the Spirit, by angels waited on
In heaven, doth make His temple in thy breast.
The Father having begot a Son most blest,
And still begetting — for he ne'er begun —
Hath deign'd to choose thee by adoption,
Co-heir to His glory, and Sabbath's endless rest.
And as a robb'd man, which by search doth find
His stolen stuff sold, must lose or buy it again,
The Sun of glory came down, and was slain,
Us whom He had made, and Satan stole, to unbind.
'Twas much, that man was made like God before,
But, that God should be made like man, much more.

XVI

Father, part of His double interest
Unto Thy kingdom Thy Son gives to me;
His jointure in the knotty Trinity
He keeps, and gives to me his death's conquest.
This Lamb, whose death with life the world hath blest,
Was from the world's beginning slain, and He
Hath made two wills, which with the legacy
Of His and Thy kingdom do thy sons invest.
Yet such are these laws, that men argue yet
Whether a man those statutes can fulfil.
None doth; but thy all-healing grace and Spirit
Revive again what law and letter kill.
Thy law's abridgement, and Thy last command
Is all but love; O let this last Will stand !

XVII

Since she whom I loved hath paid her last debt
To Nature, and to her's, and my good is dead,
And her soul early into heaven ravished,—
Wholly on heavenly things my mind is set.
Here the admiring her my mind did whet
To seek Thee, God; so streams do show their head,
But tho' I have found Thee, and Thou my thirst hast fed,
A holy thirsty dropsy melts me yet.
But why should I beg more love, whenas Thou
Dost woo my soul for hers, off'ring all Thine;
And dost not only fear lest I allow
My love to saints and angels, things divine,
But in Thy tender jealousy dost doubt
Lest the World, Flesh, yea Devil, put thee out ?

XVIII

Show me, dear Christ, Thy Spouse so bright and clear.
What ! Is it She, who on the other shore
Goes richly painted ? Or, who, robb'd and tore,
Laments and mourns in Germany and here ?
Sleeps she a thousand, then peeps up one year ?
Is she self-truth, and errs ? now new, now outwore ?
Doth she and did she and shall she evermore
On one, on seven, or on no hill appear ?
Dwells she with us, or like adventuring knights
First travail we to seek, and then make love ?
Betray, kind Husband, Thy Spouse to our sights
And let mine amorous soul court Thy mild Dove,
Who is most true, and pleasing to Thee, then
When she is embrac'd and open to most men,

XIX

Oh, to vex me, contraries meet in one;
Inconstancy unnaturally hath begot
A constant habit; that, when I would not,
I change in vows and in devotion.
As humorous is my contrition
As my profane love, and as soon forgot,
As riddlingly distemper'd, cold and hot;
As praying as mute; as infinite as none.
I durst not view Heaven yesterday; and, to-day,
In prayers and flattering speeches, I court God;
To-morrow I quake with true fear of His rod.
So my devout fits come and go away,
Like a fantastic ague, save that here
Those are my best days when I shake with fear.

much with us," "It is a beauteous evening, calm and free," and "Earth has not anything to show more fair," gave a new depth and richness to the form and made Wordsworth, perhaps, "at his best," the greatest of all sonneteers.

Besides the fine individual sonnets grouped under *Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty*, he wrote three series, *The River Duddon* (1806-20), *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* (1821), and *Sonnets upon the Punishment of Death* (1839-40). The second is a solemnly rhymed history of the Church of England which, in spite of occasional grandeur, may be left to extreme Wordsworthians and clergymen; the last is an uninspired reactionary apology for the death penalty, and painfully exhibits the author in his lyrical dotage. But the thirty-four sonnets on the River Duddon are of an earlier date and express the Wordsworth who was essentially the poet, not of Man nor of God, but of Nature.

One of Coleridge's numerous plans was to write the poetic history of a brook from its source to its mouth but no doubt the idea would have remained unrealized unless Wordsworth had unconsciously taken it over for his own uses. Starting with what is now the fourteenth sonnet, he added others "upon occasional visits to the stream or as recollections of the scenes upon its banks awakened an interest to describe them," and the result was not a set of babbling images but a moving, philosophic commentary on one of the essential features of his beloved lake country.

THE RIVER DUDDON

A SERIES OF SONNETS — 1820

It is with the little river Duddon as it is with most other rivers, Ganges and Nile not excepted,—many springs might claim the honor of being its head. In my own fancy I have fixed its rise near the noted Shirestones placed at the meeting-point of the counties, Westmoreland, Cumberland, and Lancashire. They stand by the wayside on the top of the Wrynose Pass, and it used to be reckoned a proud thing to say that, by touching them at the same time with feet and hands, one had been in the three counties at once. At what point of its course the stream takes the name of Duddon I do not know.

The River Duddon rises upon Wrynose Fell, on the confines of Westmoreland, Cumberland, and Lancashire; and, having served as a boundary to the two last counties for the space of about twenty-five miles, enters the Irish Sea, between the Isle of Walney and the Lordship of Millum.

— W. W.

I

Not envying Latian shades — if yet they throw
A grateful coolness round that crystal Spring,
Blandusia, prattling as when long ago
The Sabine Bard was moved her praise to sing;
Careless of flowers that in perennial blow
Round the moist marge of Persian fountains cling;
Heedless of Alpine torrents thundering
Through ice-built arches radiant as heaven's bow;
I seek the birthplace of a native Stream. —
All hail, ye mountains ! hail, thou morning light !
Better to breathe at large on this clear height
Than toil in needless sleep from dream to dream:
Pure flow the verse, pure, vigorous, free, and bright,
For Duddon, long-loved Duddon, is my theme !

II

Child of the clouds ! remote from every taint
Of sordid industry thy lot is cast;
Thine are the honors of the lofty waste
Not seldom, when with heat the valleys faint,
Thy handmaid Frost with spangled tissue quaint
Thy cradle decks; — to chant thy birth, thou hast
No meaner Poet than the whistling Blast,
And Desolation is thy Patron-saint !
She guards thee, ruthless Power ! who would not spare
Those mighty forests, once the bison's screen,
Where stalked the huge deer to his shaggy lair
Through paths and alleys roofed with darkest green;
Thousands of years before the silent air
Was pierced by whizzing shaft of hunter keen !

III

How shall I paint thee ? — Be this naked stone
My seat, while I give way to such intent;
Pleased could my verse, a speaking monument,
Make to the eyes of men thy features known.
But as of all those tripping lambs not one
Outruns his fellows, so hath Nature lent
To thy beginning nought that doth present
Peculiar ground for hope to build upon.
To dignify the spot that gives thee birth
No sign of hoar Antiquity's esteem
Appears, and none of modern Fortune's care;
Yet thou thyself hast round thee shed a gleam
Of brilliant moss, instinct with freshness rare;
Prompt offering of thy Foster-mother, Earth !

IV

Take, cradled Nursling of the mountain, take
This parting glance, no negligent adieu !
A Protean change seems wrought while I pursue
The curves, a loosely-scattered chain doth make;
Or rather thou appear'st a glistening snake,
Silent, and to the gazer's eye untrue,
Thridding with sinuous lapse the rushes, through
Dwarf willows gliding, and by ferny brake.
Starts from a dizzy steep the undaunted Rill
Robed instantly in garb of snow-white foam;
And laughing dares the Adventurer, who hath clomb
So high, a rival purpose to fulfil;
Else let the dastard backward wend, and roam,
Seeking less bold achievement, where he will !

V

Sole listener, Duddon ! to the breeze that played
With thy clear voice, I caught the fitful sound
Wafted o'er sullen moss and craggy mound —
Unfruitful solitudes, that seemed to upbraid
The sun in heaven ! — but now, to form a shade
For Thee, green alders have together wound
Their foliage; ashes flung their arms around;
And birch-trees risen in silver colonnade.
And thou hast also tempted here to rise,
'Mid sheltering pines, this Cottage rude and gray;
Whose ruddy children, by the mother's eyes
Carelessly watched, sport through the summer day,
Thy pleased associates: — light as endless May
On infant bosoms lonely Nature lies.

VI

FLOWERS

Ere yet our course was graced with social trees
It lacked not old remains of hawthorn bowers,
Where small birds warbled to their paramours;
And, earlier still, was heard the hum of bees;
I saw them ply their harmless robberies,
And caught the fragrance which the sundry flowers,
Fed by the stream with soft perpetual showers,
Plenteously yielded to the vagrant breeze.
There bloomed the strawberry of the wilderness;
The trembling eyebright showed her sapphire blue,
The thyme her purple, like the blush of Even;
And if the breath of some to no caress
Invited, forth they peeped so fair to view,
All kinds alike seemed favourites of Heaven.

VII

“Change me, some God, into that breathing rose !”
The love-sick Stripling fancifully sighs,
The envied flower beholding, as it lies
On Laura’s breast, in exquisite repose;
Or he would pass into her bird, that throws
The darts of song from out its wiry cage;
Enraptured, — could he for himself engage
A thousandth part of what the Nymph bestows;
And what the little careless innocent
Ungraciously receives. Too daring choice !
There are whose calmer mind it would content
To be an uncultured floweret of the glen,
Fearless of plough and scythe; or darkling wren
That tunes on Duddon’s banks her slender voice.

VIII

What aspect bore the Man who roved or fled,
First of his tribe, to this dark dell — who first
In this pellucid Current slaked his thirst ?
What hopes came with him ? what designs were spread
Along his path ? His unprotected bed
What dreams encompassed ? Was the intruder nursed
In hideous usages, and rites accursed,
That thinned the living and disturbed the dead ?
No voice replies; — both air and earth are mute;
And Thou, blue Streamlet, murmuring yield'st no more,
Than a soft record, that, whatever fruit
Of ignorance thou might'st witness heretofore,
Thy function was to heal and to restore,
To soothe and cleanse, not madden and pollute !

IX

THE STEPPING-STONES

The struggling Rill insensibly is grown
Into a Brook of loud and stately march,
Crossed ever and anon by plank or arch;
And, for like use, lo ! what might seem a zone
Chosen for ornament — stone matched with stone
In studied symmetry, with interspace
For the clear waters to pursue their race
Without restraint. How swiftly have they flown,
Succeeding — still succeeding ! Here the Child
Puts, when the high-swoln Flood runs fierce and wild,
His budding courage to the proof; and here
Declining Manhood learns to note the sly
And sure encroachments of infirmity,
Thinking how fast time runs, life's end how near !

X

THE SAME SUBJECT

Not so that Pair whose youthful spirits dance
With prompt emotion, urging them to pass;
A sweet confusion checks the Shepherd-lass;
Blushing she eyes the dizzy flood askance;
To stop ashamed — too timid to advance:
She ventures once again — another pause !
His outstretched hand he tauntingly withdraws —
She sues for health with piteous utterance !
Chidden she chides again; the thrilling touch
Both feel, when he renews the wished-for aid;
Ah ! if their fluttering hearts should stir too much,
Should beat too strongly, both may be betrayed.
The frolic Loves, who, from yon high rock, see
The struggle, clap their wings for victory !

XI

THE FAERY CHASM

No fiction was it of the antique age:
A sky-blue stone, within this sunless cleft,
Is of the very footmarks unbereft
Which tiny Elves impressed; — on that smooth stage
Dancing with all their brilliant equipage
In secret revels — haply after theft
Of some sweet Babe — Flower stolen, and coarse Weed left
For the distracted Mother to assuage
Her grief with, as she might ! — But, where, oh ! where
Is traceable a vestige of the notes
That ruled those dances wild in character ? —
Deep underground ? Or in the upper air,
On the shrill wind of midnight ? or where floats
O'er twilight fields the autumnal gossamer ?

XII

HINTS FOR THE FANCY

On, loitering Muse — the swift Stream chides us — on !
Albeit his deep-worn channel doth immure
Objects immense portrayed in miniature,
Wild shapes for many a strange comparison !
Niagaras, Alpine passes, and anon
Abodes of Naiads, calm abysses pure,
Bright liquid mansions, fashioned to endure
When the broad oak drops, a leafless skeleton,
And the solidities of mortal pride,
Palace and tower, are crumbled into dust ! —
The Bard who walks with Duddon for his guide,
Shall find such toys of fancy thickly set:
Turn from the sight, enamoured Muse — we must;
And, if thou canst, leave them without regret !

XIII

OPEN PROSPECT

Hail to the fields — with Dwellings sprinkled o'er,
And one small hamlet, under a green hill
Clustering, with barn and byre, and spouting mill !
A glance suffices; — should we wish for more,
Gay June would scorn us. But when bleak winds roar
Through the stiff lance-like shoots of pollard ash,
Dread swell of sound ! loud as the gusts that lash
The matted forests of Ontario's shore
By wasteful steel unsmitten — then would I
Turn into port; and, reckless of the gale,
Reckless of angry Duddon sweeping by,
While the warm hearth exalts the mantling ale,
Laugh with the generous household heartily
At all the merry pranks of Donnerdale !

XIV

O mountain Stream ! the Shepherd and his Cot
Are privileged Inmates of deep solitude;
Nor would the nicest Anchorite exclude
A field or two of brighter green, or plot
Of tillage-ground, that seemeth like a spot
Of stationary sunshine: — thou hast viewed
These only, Duddon ! with their paths renewed
By fits and starts, yet this contents thee not.
Thee hath some awful Spirit impelled to leave,
Utterly to desert, the haunts of men,
Though simple thy companions were and few;
And through this wilderness a passage cleave
Attended but by thy own voice, save when
The clouds and fowls of the air thy way pursue !

XV

From this deep chasm, where quivering sunbeams play
Upon its loftiest crags, mine eye behold
A gloomy NICHE, capacious, blank, and cold;
A concave free from shrubs and mosses gray;
In semblance fresh, as if, with dire affray,
Some Statue, placed amid these regions old
For tutelary service, thence had rolled,
Startling the flight of timid Yesterday !
Was it by mortals sculptored ? — weary slaves
Of slow endeavor ! or abruptly cast
Into rude shape by fire, with roaring blast
Tempestuously let loose from central caves ?
Or fashioned by the turbulence of waves,
Then, when o'er highest hills the Deluge passed ?

XVI

AMERICAN TRADITION

Such fruitless questions may not long beguile
Or plague the fancy mid the sculptured shows
Conspicuous yet where Oroonoko flows;
There would the Indian answer with a smile
Aimed at the White Man's ignorance, the while,
Of the GREAT WATERS telling how they rose,
Covered the plains, and, wandering where they chose,
Mounted through every intricate defile,
Triumphant — Inundation wide and deep,
O'er which his Fathers urged, to ridge and steep
Else unapproachable, their buoyant way;
And carved, on mural cliff's undreaded side,
Sun, moon, and stars, and beast of chase or prey;
Whate'er they sought, shunned, loved, or deified !

XVII

RETURN

A dark plume fetch me from yon blasted yew,
Perched on whose top the Danish Raven croaks;
Aloft, the imperial Bird of Rome invokes
Departed ages, shedding where he flew
Loose fragments of wild wailing, that bestrew
The clouds and thrill the chambers of the rocks;
And into silence hush the timorous flocks,
That, calmly couching while the nightly dew
Moistened each fleece, beneath the twinkling stars
Slept amid that lone Camp on Hardknot's height,
Whose Guardians bent the knee to Jove and Mars:
Or, near that mystic Round of Druid frame
Tardily sinking by its proper weight
Deep into patient Earth, from whose smooth breast it
came !

XVIII

SEATHWAITE CHAPEL

Sacred Religion ! “mother of form and fear,”
Dread arbitress of mutable respect,
New rites ordaining when the old are wrecked,
Or cease to please the fickle worshipper;
Mother of Love ! (that name best suits thee here)
Mother of Love ! for this deep vale, protect
Truth’s holy lamp, pure source of bright effect,
Gifted to purge the vapory atmosphere
That seeks to stifle it; — as in those days
When this low Pile a Gospel Teacher knew,
Whose good works formed an endless retinue:
A Pastor such as Chaucer’s verse portrays;
Such as the heaven-taught skill of Herbert drew;
And tender Goldsmith crowned with deathless praise !

XIX

TRIBUTARY STREAM

My frame hath often trembled with delight
When hope presented some far-distant good,
That seemed from heaven descending, like the flood
Of yon pure waters, from their æry height
Hurrying, with lordly Duddon to unite;
Who, ’mid a world of images imprest
On the calm depth of his transparent breast,
Appears to cherish most that Torrent white,
The fairest, softest, liveliest of them all !
And seldom hath ear listened to a tune
More lulling than the busy hum of Noon,
Swoln by that voice — whose murmur musical
Announces to the thirsty fields a boon
Dewy and fresh, till showers again shall fall.

XX

THE PLAIN OF DONNERDALE

The old inventive Poets, had they seen,
Or rather felt, the entrancement that detains
Thy waters, Duddon ! 'mid these flowery plains;
The still repose, the liquid lapse serene,
Transferred to bowers imperishably green,
Had beautified Elysium ! But these chains
Will soon be broken ; — a rough course remains,
Rough as the past ; where Thou, of placid mien,
Innocuous as a firstling of the flock,
And countenanced like a soft cerulean sky,
Shalt change thy temper ; and, with many a shock
Given and received in mutual jeopardy,
Dance, like a Bacchanal, from rock to rock,
Tossing her frantic thyrsus wide and high !

XXI

Whence that low voice ? — A whisper from the heart,
That told of days long past, when here I roved
With friends and kindred tenderly beloved ;
Some who had early mandates to depart,
Yet are allowed to steal my path athwart
By Duddon's side ; once more do we unite,
Once more beneath the kind Earth's tranquil light ;
And smothered joys into new being start.
From her unworthy seat, the cloudy stall
Of Time, breaks forth triumphant Memory ;
Her glistening tresses bound, yet light and free
As golden locks of birch, that rise and fall
On gales that breathe too gently to recall
Aught of the fading year's inclemency !

XXII

TRADITION

A love-lorn Maid, at some far-distant time,
Came to this hidden pool, whose depths surpass
In crystal clearness Dian's looking-glass;
And, gazing, saw that Rose, which from the prime
Derives its name, reflected as the chime
Of echo doth reverberate some sweet sound:
The starry treasure from the blue profound
She longed to ravish; — shall she plunge, or climb
The humid precipice, and seize the guest
Of April, smiling high in upper air?
Desperate alternative! what fiend could dare
To prompt the thought? — Upon the steep rock's breast
The lonely Primrose yet renews its bloom,
Untouched memento of her hapless doom!

XXIII

Sad thoughts, avaunt! — partake we their blithe cheer
Who gathered in betimes the unshorn flock
To wash the fleece, where haply bands of rock,
Checking the stream, make a pool smooth and clear
As this we look on. Distant Mountains hear,
Hear and repeat, the turmoil that unites
Clamor of boys and innocent despites
Of barking dogs, and bleatings from strange fear.
And what if Duddon's spotless flood receive
Unwelcome mixtures as the uncouth noise
Thickens, the pastoral River will forgive
Such wrong; nor need *we* blame the licensed joys,
Though false to Nature's quiet equipoise:
Frank are the sports, the stains are fugitive.

XXIV

THE RESTING-PLACE

Mid-noon is past; — upon the sultry mead
No zephyr breathes, no cloud its shadow throws:
If we advance unstrengthened by repose,
Farewell the solace of the vagrant reed !
This Nook — with woodbine hung and straggling weed
Tempting recess as ever pilgrim chose,
Half grot, half arbor — proffers to enclose
Body and mind, from molestations freed,
In narrow compass — narrow as itself:
Or if the Fancy, too industrious Elf,
Be loth that we should breathe awhile exempt
From new incitements friendly to our task,
Here wants not stealthy prospect, that may tempt
Loose Idless to forego her wily mask.

XXV

Methinks 't were no unprecedented feat
Should some benignant Minister of air
Lift, and encircle with a cloudy chair,
The One for whom my heart shall ever beat
With tenderest love; — or, if a safer seat
Atween his downy wings be furnished, there
Would lodge her, and the cherished burden bear
O'er hill and valley to this dim retreat !
Rough ways my steps have trod; — too rough and long
For her companionship; here dwells soft ease:
With sweets that she partakes not some distaste
Mingles, and lurking consciousness of wrong;
Languish the flowers; the waters seem to waste
Their vocal charm: their sparklings cease to please.

XXVI

Return, Content ? for fondly I pursued,
Even when a child, the Streams — unheard, unseen;
Through tangled woods, impending rocks between;
Or, free as air, with flying inquest viewed
The sullen reservoirs whence their bold broods —
Pure as the morning, fretful, boisterous, keen,
Green as the salt-sea billows, white and green —
Poured down the hills, a choral multitude !
Nor have I tracked their course for scanty gains;
They taught me random cares and truant joys,
That shield from mischief and preserve from stains
Vague minds, while men are growing out of boys;
Maturer Fancy owes to their rough noise
Impetuous thoughts that brook not servile reins.

XXVII

Fallen, and diffused into a shapeless heap,
Or quietly self-buried in earth's mould,
Is that embattled House, whose massy Keep,
Flung from yon cliff a shadow large and cold.
There dwelt the gay, the bountiful, the bold;
Till nightly lamentations, like the sweep
Of winds — though winds were silent — struck a deep
And lasting terror through that ancient Hold.
Its line of Warriors fled; — they shrunk when tried
By ghostly power: — but Time's unsparing hand
Hath plucked such foes, like weeds, from out the land;
And now, if men with men in peace abide,
All other strength the weakest may withstand,
All worst assaults may safely be defied.

XXVIII

JOURNEY RENEWED

I rose while yet the cattle, heat-opprest,
Crowded together under rustling trees
Brushed by the current of the water-breeze;
And for *their* sakes, and love of all that rest,
On Duddon's margin, in the sheltering nest;
For all that startled scaly tribes that slink
Into his coverts, and each fearless link
Of dancing insects forged upon his breast;
For those, and hopes and recollections worn
Close to the vital seat of human clay;
Glad meetings, tender partings, that upstay
The drooping mind of absence, by vows sworn
In his pure presence near the trysting thorn—
I thanked the Leader of my onward way.

XXIX

No record tells of lance opposed to lance,
Horse charging horse, 'mid these retired domains;
Tells that their turf drank purple from the veins
Of heroes, fallen, or struggling to advance,
Till doubtful combat issued in a trance
Of victory, that struck through heart and reins
Even to the inmost seat of mortal pains,
And lightened o'er the pallid countenance.
Yet, to the loyal and the brave, who lie
In the blank earth, neglected and forlorn,
The passing Winds memorial tribute pay;
The Torrents chant their praise, inspiring scorn
Of power usurped; with proclamation high,
And glad acknowledgment, of lawful sway.

XXX

Who swerves from innocence, who make divorce
Of that serene companion — a good name,
Recovers not his loss; but walks with shame,
With doubt, with fear, and haply with remorse:
And oft-times he — who, yielding to the force
Of chance-temptation, ere his journey end,
From chosen comrade turns, or faithful friend —
In vain shall rue the broken intercourse.
Not so with such as loosely wear the chain
That binds them, pleasant River ! to thy side: —
Through the rough copse wheel thou with hasty stride;
I choose to saunter o'er the grassy plain,
Sure, when the separation has been tried,
That we, who part in love, shall meet again.

XXXI

The Kirk of Ulpha to the pilgrim's eye
Is welcome as a star, that doth present
Its shining forehead through the peaceful rent
Of a black cloud diffused o'er half the sky:
Or as a fruitful palm-tree towering high
O'er the parched waste beside an Arab's tent;
Or the Indian tree whose branches, downward bent,
Take root again, a boundless canopy.
How sweet were leisure ! could it yield no more
Than 'mid that wave-washed Churchyard to recline,
From pastoral graves extracting thoughts divine;
Or there to pace, and mark the summits hoar
Of distant moonlit mountains faintly shine,
Soothed by the unseen River's gentle roar.

XXXII

Not hurled precipitous from steep to steep;
Lingering no more 'mid flower-enamelled lands
And blooming thickets; nor by rocky bands
Held; but in radiant progress toward the Deep
Where mightiest rivers into powerless sleep
Sink, and forget their nature — *now* expands
Majestic Duddon, over smooth flat sands
Gliding in silence with unfettered sweep!
Beneath an ampler sky a region wide
Is opened round him: — hamlets, towers, and towns,
And blue-topped hills, behold him from afar;
In stately mien to sovereign Thames allied
Spreading his bosom under Kentish downs,
With commerce freighted, or triumphant war.

XXXIII

CONCLUSION

But here no cannon thunders to the gale;
Upon the wave no haughty pendants cast
A crimson splendour: lowly is the mast
That rises here, and humbly spread, the sail;
While, less disturbed than in the narrow Vale
Through which with strange vicissitudes he passed,
The Wanderer seeks that receptacle vast
While all his unambitious functions fail.
And may thy Poet, cloud-born Stream! be free —
The sweets of earth contentedly resigned,
And each tumultuous working left behind
At seemly distance — to advance like Thee:
Prepared, in peace of heart, in calm of mind
And soul, to mingle with Eternity!

XXXIV

AFTER-THOUGHT

*I thought of Thee, my partner and my guide,
As being past away. — Vain sympathies !
For, backward, Duddon, as I cast my eyes,
I see what was, and is, and will abide;
Still glides the Stream, and shall forever glide;
The Form remains, the Function never dies;
While we, the brave, the mighty, and the wise,
We Men, who in our morn of youth defied
The elements, must vanish; — be it so !
Enough, if something from our hands have power
To live, and act, and serve the future hour;
And if, as toward the silent tomb we go,
Through love, through hope, and faith's transcendent
dower,
We feel that we are greater than we know.*

Chapman's translation of Homer, and then hurried home to dash off the wonderful sonnet "On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer." It was the first sign of his greatness and the one outstanding piece in his little volume of poems, published the following year. Many of the other sonnets in the same volume disclose vividly his mode of living at the time, his indebtedness to Hunt, his admiration for Haydon, his affection for his brothers Tom and George, the general broadening of his taste.

While recuperating from the excitement of his literary debut and planning a long poem on *Endymion*, Keats spent a few lonely days in April on the Isle of Wight. In a letter to a friend, John Hamilton Reynolds, he wrote: "From want of regular rest I have been rather *nervus* and the passage in Lear — 'Do you not hear the sea ?' — has haunted me continually." Then followed in the letter the lovely "Sonnet on the Sea." Months later, when *Endymion* was finished and he realized better than anyone that it was a gorgeous failure, a product of that space in life "in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted," Keats sat down to read King Lear again and "the thing appeared to demand the prologue of a sonnet." He recognized clearly that a great change had taken place within himself and from that sonnet dated the deeper, firmer note in Keats.

In the fall of 1818 Keats met Fanny Brawne; in January 1819 he began *The Eve of St. Agnes* in what was probably the happiest mood of his life; and in May came the great odes. His more personal feelings of this year, his exaltations and despairs, his doubts of Fanny and his hopes, he turned into seven memorable sonnets. One of these, "Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art," he modified slightly and copied into a volume of Shakespeare's *Poems* belonging to his friend Joseph Severn, when they were on their way to Italy. Four months later Keats was dead.

SONNETS

I

SONNET TO BYRON

Byron ! how sweetly sad thy melody !
Attuning still the soul to tenderness,
As if soft Pity, with unusual stress,
Had touch'd her plaintive lute, and thou, being by,
Hadst caught the tones, nor suffer'd them to die.
O'ershadowing sorrow doth not make thee less
Delightful: thou thy griefs dost dress
With a bright halo, shining beamily,
As when a cloud the golden moon doth veil,
Its sides are ting'd with a resplendent glow,
Through the dark robe oft amber rays prevail,
And like fair veins in sable marble flow;
Still warble, dying swan ! still tell the tale,
The enchanting tale, the tale of pleasing woe.

II

SONNET TO CHATTERTON

O Chatterton ! how very sad thy fate !
Dear child of sorrow — son of misery !
How soon the film of death obscur'd that eye,
Whence Genius mildly flash'd, and high debate.
How soon that voice, majestic and elate,
Melted in dying numbers ! Oh ! how nigh
Was night to thy fair morning. Thou didst die
A half-blown flow'ret which cold blasts amate.
But this is past: thou art among the stars
Of highest Heaven: to the rolling spheres
Thou sweetly singest: naught thy hymning mars,
Above the ingrate world and human fears.
On earth the good man base detraction bars
From thy fair name, and waters it with tears.

III

O Solitude ! if I must with thee dwell,
Let it not be among the jumbled heap
Of murky buildings; climb with me the steep, —
Nature's observatory — whence the dell,
Its flowery slopes, its river's crystal swell,
May seem a span; let me thy vigils keep
'Mongst boughs pavillion'd, where the deer's swift leap
Startles the wild bee from the fox-glove bell.
But though I'll gladly trace these scenes with thee,
Yet the sweet converse of an innocent mind,
Whose words are images of thoughts refin'd,
Is my soul's pleasure; and it sure must be
Almost the highest bliss of human-kind,
When to thy haunts two kindred spirits flee.

IV

How many bards gild the lapses of time !
A few of them have ever been the food
Of my delighted fancy, — I could brood
Over their beauties, earthly, or sublime:
And often, when I sit me down to rhyme,
These will in throngs before my mind intrude:
But no confusion, no disturbance rude
Do they occasion, 'tis a pleasing chime.
So the unnumber'd sounds that evening store;
The songs of birds — the whisp'ring of the leaves —
The voice of waters — the great bell that heaves
With solemn sound, — and thousand others more,
That distance of recognizance bereaves,
Make pleasing music, and not wild uproar.

V

To one who has been long in city pent,
'Tis very sweet to look into the fair
And open face of heaven, — to breathe a prayer
Full in the smile of the blue firmament.
Who is more happy, when, with heart's content,
Fatigued he sinks into some pleasant lair
Of wavy grass, and reads a debonair
And gentle tale of love and languishment ?
Returning home at evening, with an ear
Catching the notes of Philomel, — an eye
Watching the sailing cloudlet's bright career,
He mourns that day so soon has glided by:
E'en like the passage of an angel's tear
That falls through the clear ether silently.

VI

TO MY BROTHER GEORGE

Many the wonders I this day have seen:
The sun, when first he kist away the tears
That fill'd the eyes of morn; — the laurell'd peers
Who from the feathery gold of evening lean; —
The ocean with its vastness, its blue green,
Its ships, its rocks, its caves, its hopes, its fears, —
Its voice mysterious, which whoso hears
Must think on what will be, and what has been.
E'en now, dear George, while this for you I write,
Cynthia is from her silken curtains peeping
So scantily, that it seems her bridal night,
And she her half-discover'd revels keeping.
But what, without the social thought of thee,
Would be the wonders of the sky and sea ?

VII

ON FIRST LOOKING INTO CHAPMAN'S HOMER

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne;
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He star'd at the Pacific — and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise —
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

VIII

TO MY BROTHERS

Small, busy flames play through the fresh laid coals,
And their faint cracklings o'er our silence creep
Like whispers of the household gods that keep
A gentle empire o'er fraternal souls.
And while, for rhymes, I search around the poles,
Your eyes are fix'd, as in poetic sleep,
Upon the lore so voluble and deep,
That aye at fall of night our care condoes.
This is your birth-day Tom, and I rejoice
That thus it passes smoothly, quietly.
Many such eves of gently whisp'ring noise
May we together pass, and calmly try
What are this world's true joys, — ere the great voice,
From its fair face, shall bid our spirits fly.

IX

Keen, fitful gusts are whisp'ring here and there
Among the bushes half leafless, and dry;
The stars look very cold about the sky,
And I have many miles on foot to fare.
Yet feel I little of the cool bleak air,
Or of the dead leaves rustling drearily,
Or of those silver lamps that burn on high,
Or of the distance from home's pleasant lair:
For I am brimfull of the friendliness
That in a little cottage I have found;
Of fair-hair'd Milton's eloquent distress,
And all his love for gentle Lycid drown'd;
Of lovely Laura in her light green dress,
And faithful Petrarch gloriously crown'd.

X

ADDRESSED TO HAYDON

Great spirits now on earth are sojourning;
He of the cloud, the cataract, the lake,
Who on Helvellyn's summit, wide awake,
Catches his freshness from Archangel's wing:
He of the rose, the violet, the spring,
The social smile, the chain for Freedom's sake:
And lo! — whose steadfastness would never take
A meaner sound than Raphael's whispering.
And other spirits there are standing apart
Upon the forehead of the age to come;
These, these will give the world another heart,
And other pulses. Hear ye not the hum
Of mighty workings? —
Listen awhile ye nations, and be dumb.

XI

WRITTEN IN DISGUST OF VULGAR SUPERSTITION

The church bells toll a melancholy round,
Calling the people to some other prayers,
Some other gloominess, more dreadful cares,
More hearkening to the sermon's horrid sound.
Surely the mind of man is closely bound
In some black spell; seeing that each one tears
Himself from fireside joys, and Lydian airs,
And converse high of those with glory crown'd.
Still, still they toll, and I should feel a damp,—
A chill as from a tomb, did I not know
That they are dying like an outburnt lamp;
That 'tis their sighing, wailing ere they go
Into oblivion;—that fresh flowers will grow,
And many glories of immortal stamp.

XII

ON THE GRASSHOPPER AND CRICKET

The poetry of earth is never dead:
When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,
And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run
From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead;
That is the Grasshopper's—he takes the lead
In summer luxury,—he has never done
With his delights; for when tired out with fun
He rests at ease beneath some pleasant weed.
The poetry of earth is ceasing never:
On a lone winter evening, when the frost
Has wrought a silence, from the stove there shrills
The Cricket's song, in warmth increasing ever,
And seems to one in drowsiness half lost,
The Grasshopper's among some grassy hills.

XIII

After dark vapors have oppress'd our plains
For a long dreary season, comes a day
Born of the gentle South, and clears away
From the sick heavens all unseemly stains.
The anxious month, relieved of its pains,
Takes as a long-lost right the feel of May;
The eyelids with the passing coolness play
Like rose leaves with the drip of Summer rains.
The calmest thoughts come round us; as of leaves
Budding—fruit ripening in stillness—Autumn suns
Smiling at eve upon the quiet sheaves—
Sweet Sappho's cheek—a smiling infant's breath—
The gradual sand that through an hour-glass runs—
A woodland rivulet—a Poet's death.

XIV

TO LEIGH HUNT, ESQ.

Glory and loveliness have pass'd away;
For if we wander out in early morn,
No wreathed incense do we see upborne
Into the east, to meet the smiling day:
No crowd of nymphs soft voic'd and young, and gay,
In woven baskets bringing ears of corn,
Roses, and pinks, and violets, to adorn
The shrine of Flora in her early May.
But there are left delights as high as these,
And I shall ever bless my destiny,
That in a time, when under pleasant trees
Pan is no longer sought, I feel a free,
A leafy luxury, seeing I could please
With these poor offerings, a man like thee.

XV

[Written at the end of "The Floure and the Lefe"]

This pleasant tale is like a little copse:
The honied lines do freshly interlace
To keep the reader in so sweet a place,
So that he here and there full-hearted stops;
And oftentimes he feels the dewy drops
Come cool and suddenly against his face,
And by the wandering melody may trace
Which way the tender-legged linnet hops.
Oh! what a power hath white Simplicity!
What mighty power has this gentle story!
I that for ever feel athirst for glory
Could at this moment be content to lie
Meekly upon the grass, as those whose sobbings
Were heard of none beside the mournful robins.

XVI

ON SEEING THE ELGIN MARBLES

My spirit is too weak — mortality
Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep,
And each imagin'd pinnacle and steep
Of godlike hardship, tells me I must die
Like a sick Eagle looking at the sky.
Yet 'tis a gentle luxury to weep
That I have not the cloudy winds to keep,
Fresh for the opening of the morning's eye.
Such dim-conceived glories of the brain
Bring round the heart an undescribable feud;
So do these wonders a most dizzy pain,
That mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude
Wasting of old Time — with a billowy main —
A sun — a shadow of a magnitude.

XVII

ON THE SEA

It keeps eternal whisperings around
Desolate shores, and with its mighty swell
Gluts twice ten thousand Caverns, till the spell
Of Hecate leaves them their old shadowy sound.
Often 'tis in such gentle temper found,
That scarcely will the very smallest shell
Be mov'd for days from where it sometime fell,
When last the winds of Heaven were unbound.
Oh ye ! who have your eye-balls vex'd and tir'd,
Feast them upon the wideness of the Sea;
Oh ye ! whose ears are dinn'd with uproar rude,
Or fed too much with cloying melody —
Sit ye near some old Cavern's Mouth, and brood
Until ye start, as if the sea-nymphs quir'd !

XVIII

ON SITTING DOWN TO READ KING LEAR ONCE AGAIN

O Golden tongued Romance, with serene lute !
Fair plumed Syren, Queen of far-away !
Leave melodizing on this wintry day,
Shut up thine olden pages, and be mute:
Adieu ! for, once again, the fierce dispute
Betwixt damnation and impassion'd clay
Must I burn through; once more humbly assay
The bitter-sweet of this Shakespearian fruit:
Chief Poet ! and ye clouds of Albion,
Begetters of our deep eternal theme !
When through the old oak Forest I am gone,
Let me not wander in a barren dream,
But, when I am consumed in the fire,
Give me new Phoenix wings to fly at my desire.

XIX

When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
Before high-piled books, in charactery,
Hold like rich garners the full ripen'd grain;
When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love; — then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.

XX

TO A LADY SEEN FOR A FEW MOMENTS AT VAUXHALL

Time's sea hath been five years at its slow ebb,
Long hours have to and fro let creep the sand,
Since I was tangled in thy beauty's web,
And snared by the ungloving of thine hand.
And yet I never look on midnight sky,
But I behold thine eyes' well memory'd light;
I cannot look upon the rose's dye,
But to thy cheek my soul doth take its flight.
I cannot look on any budding flower,
But my fond ear, in fancy at thy lips
And hearkening for a love-sound, doth devour
Its sweets in the wrong sense: — Thou dost eclipse
Every delight with sweet remembering,
And grief unto my darling joys dost bring.

XXI

WHAT THE THRUSH SAID

Lines from a Letter to John Hamilton Reynolds

O thou whose face hath felt the Winter's wind,
Whose eye has seen the snow-clouds hung in mist,
And the black elm tops 'mong the freezing stars,
To thee the spring will be a harvest-time.
O thou, whose only book has been the light
Of supreme darkness which thou feddest on
Night after night when Phoebus was away,
To thee the Spring shall be a triple morn.
O fret not after knowledge—I have none,
And yet my song comes native with the warmth.
O fret not after knowledge—I have none,
And yet the Evening listens. He who saddens
At thought of idleness cannot be idle,
And he's awake who thinks himself asleep.

XXII

ON VISITING THE TOMB OF BURNS

The town, the churchyard, and the setting sun,
The clouds, the trees, the rounded hills all seem,
Though beautiful, cold—strange—as in a dream,
I dreamed long ago, now new begun.
The short-liv'd paly Summer is but won
From Winter's ague, for one hour's gleam;
Though sapphire-warm, their stars do never beam:
All is cold Beauty; pain is never done:
For who has mind to relish, Minos-wise,
The Real of Beauty, free from that dead hue
Sickly imagination and sick pride
Cast wan upon it! Burns! with honour due
I oft have honour'd thee. Great shadow, hide
Thy face; I sin against thy native skies.

XXIII

TO AILSA ROCK

Hearken, thou craggy ocean pyramid !
Give answer from thy voice, the sea-fowls' screams !
When were thy shoulders mantled in huge streams ?
When, from the sun, was thy broad forehead hid ?
How long is't since the mighty power bid
Thee heave to airy sleep from fathom dreams ?
Sleep in the lap of thunder or sunbeams,
Or when grey clouds are thy cold coverlid.
Thou answer'st not; for thou art dead asleep;
Thy life is but two dead eternities —
The last in air, the former in the deep;
First with the whales, last with the eagle-skies —
Drown'd wast thou till an earthquake made thee steep,
Another cannot wake thy giant size.

XXIV

Why did I laugh to-night ? No voice will tell:
No God, no Demon of severe response,
Deigns to reply from heaven or from Hell.
Then to my human heart I turn at once.
Heart ! Thou and I are here sad and alone;
I say, why did I laugh ! O mortal pain !
O Darkness ! Darkness ! ever must I moan,
To question Heaven and Hell and Heart in vain.
Why did I laugh ? I know this Being's lease,
My fancy to its utmost blisses spreads;
Yet would I on this very midnight cease,
And the world's gaudy ensigns see in shreds;
Verse, Fame, and Beauty are intense indeed,
But Death intenser — Death is Life's high meed.

XXV

ON FAME

"You cannot eat your cake and have it too."—Proverb.

How fever'd is the man, who cannot look
Upon his mortal days with temperate blood,
Who vexes all the leaves of his life's book,
And robs his fair name of its maidenhood;
It is as if the rose should pluck herself,
Or the ripe plum finger its misty bloom,
As if a Naiad, like a meddling elf,
Should darken her pure grot with muddy gloom,
But the rose leaves herself upon the briar,
For winds to kiss and grateful bees to feed,
And the ripe plum still wears its dim attire,
The undisturbed lake has crystal space,
Why then should man, teasing the world for grace,
Spoil his salvation for a fierce miscreed ?

XXVI

A DREAM, AFTER READING DANTE'S EPISODE OF PAOLO
AND FRANCESCA

As Hermes once took to his feathers light,
When lulled Argus, baffled, swoon'd and slept,
So on a Delphic reed, my idle spright
So play'd, so charm'd, so conquer'd, so bereft
The dragon-world of all its hundred eyes;
And, seeing it asleep, so fled away —
Not to pure Ida with its snow-cold skies,
Nor unto Tempe where Jove griev'd a day;
But to that second circle of sad hell,
Where 'mid the gust, the whirlwind, and the flaw
Of rain and hail-stones, lovers need not tell
Their sorrows. Pale were the sweet lips I saw,
Pale were the lips I kiss'd, and fair the form
I floated with, about that melancholy storm.

XXVII

TO SLEEP

O soft embalmer of the still midnight,
Shutting, with careful fingers and benign,
Our gloom-pleas'd eyes, embower'd from the light,
Enshaded in forgetfulness divine:
O soothest Sleep ! if so it pleases thee, close
In midst of this thine hymn my willing eyes,
Or wait the "Amen," ere thy poppy throws
Around my bed its lulling charities.
Then save me, or the passed day will shine
Upon my pillow, breeding many woes, —
Save me from curious Conscience, that still lords
Its strength for darkness, burrowing like a mole;
Turn the key deftly in the oiled wards,
And seal the hushed Casket of my Soul.

XXVIII

The day is gone, and all its sweets are gone !
Sweet voice, sweet lips, soft hand, and softer breast,
Warm breath, light whisper, tender semi-tone,
Bright eyes, accomplish'd shape, and lang'rous waist !
Faded the flower and all its budded charms,
Faded the sight of beauty from my eyes,
Faded the shape of beauty from my arms,
Faded the voice, warmth, whiteness, paradise —
Vanish'd unseasonably at shut of eve,
When the dusk holiday — or holinight
Of fragrant-curtain'd love begins to weave
The woof of darkness thick, for hid delight;
But, as I've read love's missal through to-day,
He'll let me sleep, seeing I fast and pray.

XXIX

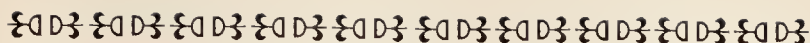
TO FANNY

I cry your mercy — pity — love ! — aye, love !
Merciful love that tantalizes not,
One-thoughted, never-wandering, guileless love,
Unmask'd, and being seen — without a blot !
O ! let me have thee whole, — all — all — be mine !
That shape, that fairness, that sweet minor zest
Of love, your kiss, — those hands, those eyes divine,
That warm, white, lucent, million-pleasured breast, —
Yourself — your soul — in pity give me all,
Withold no atom's atom or I die,
Or living on perhaps, your wretched thrall,
Forget, in the mist of idle misery,
Life's purposes, — the palate of my mind
Losing its gust, and my ambition blind !

XXX

WRITTEN ON A BLANK PAGE IN SHAKESPEARE'S POEMS,
FACING "A LOVER'S COMPLAINT"

Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art —
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors —
No — yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever — or else swoon to death.



VI—ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

[1806-1861]

AT THE age of thirty-nine Elizabeth Barrett was an invalid, wasting away in a gloomy house ruled over by a tyrannical father. She had been a very precocious child and at the age of thirteen saw printed her "epic in four books" on the battle of Marathon. Later she plunged deeply into Greek, Latin, and philosophy, became the friend of scholars and published three volumes of poems which placed her in the front rank of living poets and were especially noteworthy in so arid a decade, between the passing of the old giants and the coming of the new. She had had an intensely full intellectual life, certainly, but far too circumscribed, and permanently saddened by the drowning of her beloved brother. As her spinal injury seemed to be beyond recovery, she could only look forward to indefinite years in that dimly-lit room, where a few visitors were permitted to come and where her two intimidated sisters took refuge from the Argus eyes of their fanatically austere parent.

Early in 1845 she received a letter in praise of her recently published volumes of poems from Robert Browning whose fame, chiefly based on *Pauline*, *Paracelsus* and *Sordello*, had not yet spread beyond the select literary circles. But Miss Barrett knew his work and admired it in spite of the difficult obscurities. To her friend Mrs. Martin she wrote: "I had a letter from Browning the poet last night, which threw me in ecstasies—Browning, the author of 'Paracelsus' and king of the mystics." And within a week: "Well, then, I am getting deeper and deeper into correspondence with Robert Browning, poet and mystic, and we are growing to be the truest of friends. If I live a little longer shut up in this room, I shall certainly know every-

body in the world." Unwilling to ruin his life with the burden of an invalid, she at first tried to discourage his attachment but it was of no avail as "he preferred, he said, of free and deliberate choice, to be allowed to sit only an hour a day by her side, to the fulfilment of the brightest dream which should exclude her, in any possible world." For some mysterious reason Barrett had forbade his daughters to marry, and consequently after more than a year of ardent, secret courtship, Browning married Miss Barrett without her father's knowledge. A week later they fled to Italy where the supposed invalid recovered her health sufficiently to have a son and live actively for fifteen happy years.

During that exciting betrothal, Mrs. Browning poured her pent-up emotions, ranging from a surprised despair to an ecstatic idolatry, into a series of sonnets, which she timidly gave to her husband after they had been some weeks in Italy. Not even having suspected their existence, he was completely carried away by their beauty, declaring afterward with pardonable enthusiasm: "I dared not reserve to myself the finest sonnets written in any language since Shakespeare's." But as Mrs. Browning was reluctant to publish so intimate a confession, the sonnets were first printed privately and then introduced into the 1850 edition of her poems under the obscure title suggested by Browning, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*.

In this sequence Mrs. Browning not only surpassed all those that had preceded her, except Shakespeare's, but all that were to follow, with the possible exception of Rossetti's. In this sequence she had not only written her own masterpiece, but perhaps the masterpiece among long poems by women.

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING 157
SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE

I

I thought once how Theocritus had sung
Of the sweet years, the dear and wished-for years,
Who each one in a gracious hand appears
To bear a gift for mortals, old or young:
And, as I mused it in his antique tongue,
I saw, in gradual vision through my tears,
The sweet, sad years, the melancholy years,
Those of my own life, who by turns had flung
A shadow across me. Straightway I was 'ware,
So weeping, how a mystic Shape did move
Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair;
And a voice said in mastery, while I strove, —
“Guess now who holds thee?” — “Death,” I said. But,
there,
The silver answer rang, — “Not Death, but Love.”

II

But only three in all God's universe
Have heard this word thou hast said, — Himself, beside
Thee speaking, and me listening! and replied
One of us . . . *that* was God, . . . and laid the curse
So darkly on my eyelids, as to amerce
My sight from seeing thee, — that if I had died, .
The deathweights, placed there, would have signified
Less absolute exclusion. “Nay” is worse
From God than from all others, O my friend!
Men could not part us with their worldly jars,
Nor the seas change us, nor the tempests bend;
Our hands would touch for all the mountain-bars:
And, heaven being rolled between us at the end,
We should but vow the faster for the stars.

III

Unlike are we, unlike, O princely Heart !
 Unlike our uses and our destinies.
 Our ministering two angels look surprise
 On one another, as they strike athwart
 Their wings in passing. Thou, bethink thee, art
 A guest for queens to social pageantries,
 With gages from a hundred brighter eyes
 Than tears even can make mine, to play thy part
 Of chief musician. What hast *thou* to do
 With looking from the lattice-lights at me,
 A poor, tired, wandering singer, singing through
 The dark, and leaning up a cypress tree ?
 The chrism is on thine head, — on mine, the dew, —
 And Death must dig the level where these agree.

IV

Thou hast thy calling to some palace-floor,
 Most gracious singer of high poems ! where
 The dancers will break footing, from the care
 Of watching up thy pregnant lips for more.
 And dost thou lift this house's latch too poor
 For hand of thine ? and canst thou think and bear
 To let thy music drop here unaware
 In folds of golden fulness at my door ?
 Look up and see the casement broken in,
 The bats and owlets builders in the roof !
 My cricket chirps against thy mandolin.
 Hush, call no echo up in further proof
 Of desolation ! there's a voice within
 That weeps . . . as thou must sing . . . alone, aloof.

V

I lift my heavy heart up solemnly,
As once Electra her sepulchral urn,
And, looking in thine eyes, I overturn
The ashes at thy feet. Behold and see
What a great heap of grief lay hid in me,
And how the red wild sparkles dimly burn
Through the ashen greyness. If thy foot in scorn
Could tread them out to darkness utterly,
It might be well perhaps. But if instead
Thou wait beside me for the wind to blow
The grey dust up, . . . those laurels on thine head,
O my Belovèd, will not shield thee so,
That none of all the fires shall scorch and shred
The hair beneath. Stand farther off then ! go.

VI

Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand
Henceforward in thy shadow. Nevermore
Alone upon the threshold of my door
Of individual life, I shall command
The uses of my soul, nor lift my hand
Serenely in the sunshine as before,
Without the sense of that which I forbore —
Thy touch upon the palm. The widest land
Doom takes to part us, leaves thy heart in mine
With pulses that beat double. What I do
And what I dream include thee, as the wine
Must taste of its own grapes. And when I sue
God for myself, He hears that name of thine,
And sees within my eyes the tears of two.

VII

The face of all the world is changed, I think,
Since first I heard the footsteps of thy soul
Move still, oh, still, beside me, as they stole
Betwixt me and the dreadful outer brink
Of obvious death, where I, who thought to sink,
Was caught up into love, and taught the whole
Of life in a new rhythm. The cup of dole
God gave for baptism, I am fain to drink,
And praise its sweetness, Sweet, with thee anear.
The names of country, heaven, are changed away
For where thou art or shalt be, there or here;
And this . . . this lute and song . . . loved yesterday,
(The singing angels know) are only dear
Because thy name moves right in what they say.

VIII

What can I give thee back, O liberal
And princely giver, who hast brought the gold
And purple of thine heart, unstained, untold,
And laid them on the outside of the wall
For such as I to take or leave withal,
In unexpected largesse? am I cold,
Ungrateful, that for these most manifold
High gifts, I render nothing back at all?
Not so; not cold,—but very poor instead.
Ask God who knows. For frequent tears have run
The colours from my life, and left so dead
And pale a stuff, it were not fitly done
To give the same as pillow to thy head.
Go farther! let it serve to trample on.

IX

Can it be right to give what I can give ?
 To let thee sit beneath the fall of tears
 As salt as mine, and hear the sighing years
 Re-sighing on my lips renunciative
 Through those infrequent smiles which fail to live
 For all thy adjurations ? O my fears,
 That this can scarce be right ! We are not peers,
 So to be lovers ; and I own, and grieve,
 That givers of such gifts as mine are, must
 Be counted with the ungenerous. Out, alas !
 I will not soil thy purple with my dust,
 Nor breathe my poison on thy Venice-glass,
 Nor give thee any love — which were unjust.
 Beloved, I only love thee ! let it pass.

X

Yet, love, mere love, is beautiful indeed
 And worthy of acceptance. Fire is bright,
 Let temple burn, or flax ; an equal light
 Leaps in the flame from cedar-plank or weed :
 And love is fire. And when I say at need
I love thee . . . mark ! . . . I love thee — in thy sight
 I stand transfigured, glorified aright,
 With conscience of the new rays that proceed
 Out of my face toward thine. There's nothing low
 In love, when love the lowest : meanest creatures
 Who love God, God accepts while loving so.
 And what I *feel*, across the inferior features
 Of what I *am*, doth flash itself, and show
 How that great work of Love enhances Nature's.

XI

And therefore if to love can be desert,
I am not all unworthy. Cheeks as pale
As these you see, and trembling knees that fail
To bear the burden of a heavy heart,—
This weary minstrel-life that once was girt
To climb Aornus, and can scarce avail
To pipe now 'gainst the valley nightingale
A melancholy music,—why advert
To these things? O Belovèd, it is plain
I am not of thy worth nor for thy place!
And yet, because I love thee, I obtain
From that same love this vindicating grace,
To live on still in love, and yet in vain,—
To bless thee, yet renounce thee to thy face.

XII

Indeed this very love which is my boast,
And which, when rising up from breast to brow,
Doth crown me with a ruby large enow
To draw men's eyes and prove the inner cost,—
This love even, all my worth, to the uttermost,
I should not love withal, unless that thou
Hadst set me an example, shown me how,
When first thine earnest eyes with mine were crossed,
And love called love. And thus, I cannot speak
Of love even, as a good thing of my own:
Thy soul hath snatched up mine all faint and weak,
And placed it by thee on a golden throne,—
And that I love (O soul, we must be meek!)
Is by thee only, whom I love alone.

XIII

And wilt thou have me fashion into speech
The love I bear thee, finding words enough,
And hold the torch out, while the winds are rough,
Between our faces, to cast light on each? —
I drop at thy feet. I cannot teach
My hand to hold my spirit so far off
From myself — me — that I should bring thee proof
In words, of love hid in me out of reach.
Nay, let the silence of my womanhood
Commend my woman-love to thy belief, —
Seeing that I stand unwon, however wooed,
And rend the garment of my life, in brief,
By a most dauntless, voiceless fortitude,
Lest one touch of this heart convey its grief.

XIV

If thou must love me, let it be for nought
Except for love's sake only. Do not say
"I love her for her smile — her look — her way
Of speaking gently, — for a trick of thought
That falls in well with mine, and certes brought
A sense of pleasant ease on such a day" —
For these things in themselves, Belovèd, may
Be changed, or change for thee, — and love, so wrought,
May be unwrought so. Neither love me for
Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks dry, —
A creature might forget to weep, who bore
Thy comfort long, and lose thy love thereby!
But love me for love's sake, that evermore
Thou may'st love on, through love's eternity.

XV

Accuse me not, beseech thee, that I wear
Too calm and sad a face in front of thine;
For we two look two ways, and cannot shine
With the same sunlight on our brow and hair.
On me thou lookest with no doubting care,
As on a bee shut in a crystalline;
Since sorrow hath shut me safe in love's divine,
And to spread wing and fly in the outer air
Were most impossible failure, if I strove
To fail so. But I look on thee — on thee —
Beholding, besides love, the end of love,
Hearing oblivion beyond memory!
As one who sits and gazes from above,
Over the rivers to the bitter sea.

XVI

And yet, because thou overcomest so,
Because thou art more noble and like a king,
Thou canst prevail against my fears and fling
Thy purple round me, till my heart shall grow
Too close against thine heart henceforth to know
How it shook when alone. Why, conquering
May prove as lordly and complete a thing
In lifting upward, as in crushing low!
And as a vanquished soldier yields his sword
To one who lifts him from the bloody earth, —
Even so, Belovèd, I at last record,
Here ends my strife. If *thou* invite me forth,
I rise above abasement at the word.
Make thy love larger to enlarge my worth.

XVII

My poet, thou canst touch on all the notes
God set between His After and Before,
And strike up and strike off the general roar
Of the rushing worlds, a melody that floats
In a serene air purely. Antidotes
Of medicated music, answering for
Mankind's forlornest uses, thou canst pour
From thence into their ears. God's will devotes
Thine to such ends, and mine to wait on thine.
How, Dearest, wilt thou have me for most use?
A hope, to sing by gladly? or a fine
Sad memory, with thy songs to interfuse?
A shade, in which to sing — of palm or pine?
A grave, on which to rest from singing? . . . Choose.

XVIII

I never gave a lock of hair away
To a man, dearest, except this to thee,
Which now upon my fingers thoughtfully,
I ring out to the full brown length and say
"Take it." My day of youth went yesterday;
My hair no longer bounds to my foot's glee,
Nor plant I it from rose or myrtle-tree,
As girls do, any more: it only may
Now shade on two pale cheeks the mark of tears,
Taught drooping from the head that hangs aside
Through sorrow's trick. I thought the funeral-shears
Would take this first, but Love is justified, —
Take it thou, — finding pure, from all those years,
The kiss my mother left here when she died.

XIX

The soul's Rialto hath its merchandise;
I barter curl for curl upon that mart,
And from my poet's forehead to my heart
Receive this lock which outweighs argosies, —
As purple black, as erst to Pindar's eyes
The dim purpureal tresses gloomed athwart
The nine white Muse-brows. For this counterpart, . . .
The bay-crown's shade, Belovèd, I surmise,
Still lingers on thy curl, it is so black !
Thus, with a fillet of smooth-kissing breath,
I tie the shadows safe from gliding back,
And lay the gift where nothing hindereth;
Here on my heart, as on thy brow, to lack
No natural heat till mine grows cold in death.

XX

Belovèd, my Belovèd, when I think
That thou wast in the world a year ago,
What time I sat alone here in the snow
And saw no footprint, heard the silence sink
No moment at thy voice, but, link by link,
Went counting all my chains as if that so
They never could fall off at any blow
Struck by thy possible hand, — why, thus I drink
Of life's great cup of wonder ! Wonderful,
Never to feel thee thrill the day or night
With personal act or speech, — nor ever cull
Some prescience of thee with the blossoms white
Thou sawest growing ! Atheists are as dull
Who cannot guess God's presence out of sight.

XXI

Say over again, and yet once over again,
That thou dost love me. Though the word repeated
Should seem "a cuckoo-song," as thou dost treat it,
Remember, never to the hill or plain,
Valley and wood, without her cuckoo-strain
Comes the fresh Spring in all her green completed.
Belovèd, I, amid the darkness greeted
By a doubtful spirit-voice, in that doubt's pain
Cry, "Speak once more—thou lovest!" Who can fear
Too many stars, though each in heaven shall roll,
Too many flowers, though each shall crown the year?
Say thou dost love me, love me, love me—toll
The silver iterance!—only minding, dear,
To love me also in silence with thy soul.

XXII

When our two souls stand up erect and strong,
Face to face, silent, drawing nigh and nigher,
Until the lengthening wings break into fire
At either curvèd point,—what bitter wrong
Can the earth do to us, that we should not long
Be here contented? Think. In mounting higher,
The angels would press on us and aspire
To drop some golden orb of perfect song
Into our deep, dear silence. Let us stay
Rather on earth, Belovèd,—where the unfit
Contrarious moods of men recoil away
And isolate pure spirits, and permit
A place to stand and love in for a day,
With darkness and the death-hour rounding it.

XXIII

Is it indeed so ? If I lay here dead,
Wouldst thou miss any life in losing mine ?
And would the sun for thee more coldly shine
Because of grave-damps falling round my head ?
I marvelled, my Belovèd, when I read
Thy thought so in the letter. I am thine —
But . . . so much to thee ? Can I pour thy wine
While my hands tremble ? Then my soul, instead
Of dreams of death, resumes life's lower range.
Then, love me, Love ! Look on me — breathe on me !
As brighter ladies do not count it strange,
For love, to give up acres and degree,
I yield the grave for thy sake, and exchange
My near sweet view of Heaven, for earth with thee !

XXIV

Let the world's sharpness, like a claspings knife,
Shut in upon itself and do no harm
In this close hand of Love, now soft and warm,
And let us hear no sound of human strife
After the click of the shutting. Life to life —
I lean upon thee, dear, without alarm,
And feel as safe as guarded by a charm
Against the stab of worldlings, who if rife
Are weak to injure. Very whitely still
The lilies of our lives may reassure
Their blossoms from their roots, accessible
Alone to heavenly dews that drop not fewer;
Growing straight, out of man's reach, on the hill.
God only, who made us rich, can make us poor.

XXV

A heavy heart, Belovèd, have I borne
From year to year until I saw thy face,
And sorrow after sorrow took the place
Of all those natural joys as lightly worn
As the stringed pearls, each lifted in its turn
By a beating heart at dance-time. Hopes apace
Were changed to long despairs, till God's own grace
Could scarcely lift above the world forlorn
My heavy heart. Then *thou* didst bid me bring
And let it drop adown thy calmly great
Deep being ! Fast it sinketh, as a thing
Which its own nature doth precipitate,
While thine doth close above it, mediating
Betwixt the stars and the unaccomplished fate.

XXVI

I lived with visions for my company
Instead of men and women, years ago,
And found them gentle mates, nor thought to know
A sweeter music than they played to me.
But soon their trailing purple was not free
Of this world's dust, their lutes did silent grow,
And I myself grew faint and blind below
Their vanishing eyes. Then *thou* didst come — to be,
Belovèd, what they seemed. Their shining fronts,
Their songs, their splendours (better, yet the same,
As river-water hallowed into fonts),
Met in thee, and from out thee overcame
My soul with satisfaction of all wants —
Because God's gifts put man's best dreams to shame.

XXVII

My own Belovèd, who hast lifted me
 From this drear flat of earth where I was thrown,
 And, in betwixt the languid ringlets, blown
 A life-breath, till the forehead hopefully
 Shines out again, as all the angels see,
 Before thy saving kiss! My own, my own,
 Who camest to me when the world was gone,
 And I who looked for only God, found *thee*!
 I find thee; I am safe, and strong, and glad.
 As one who stands in dewless asphodel
 Looks backward on the tedious time he had
 In the upper life,—so I, with bosom-swell,
 Make witness, here, between the good and bad,
 That Love, as strong as Death, retrieves as well.

XXVIII

My letters! all dead paper, mute and white!
 And yet they seem alive and quivering
 Against my tremulous hands which loose the string
 And let them drop down on my knee to-night,
 This said,—he wished to have me in his sight
 Once, as a friend: this fixed a day in spring
 To come and touch my hand . . . a simple thing,
 Yet I wept for it!—this, . . . the paper's light . . .
 Said, *Dear, I love thee*; and I sank and quailed
 As if God's future thundered on my past.
 This said, *I am thine*—and so its ink has paled
 With lying at my heart that beat too fast.
 And this . . . O Love, thy words have ill availed
 If, what this said, I dared repeat at last!

XXIX

I think of thee! — my thoughts do twine and bud
About thee, as wild vines, about a tree,
Put out broad leaves, and soon there's nought to see
Except the straggling green which hides the wood.
Yet, O my palm-tree, be it understood
I will not have my thoughts instead of thee
Who art dearer, better! rather, instantly
Renew thy presence. As a strong tree should,
Rustle thy boughs and set thy trunk all bare,
And let these bands of greenery which insphere thee
Drop heavily down, — burst, shattered, everywhere!
Because, in this deep joy to see and hear thee
And breathe within thy shadow a new air,
I do not think of thee — I am too near thee.

XXX

I see thine image through my tears to-night,
And yet to-day I saw thee smiling. How
Refer the cause? — Belovèd, is it thou
Or I, who makes me sad? The acolyte
Amid the chanted joy and thankful rite
May so fall flat, with pale insensate brow
On the altar-stair. I hear thy voice and vow,
Perplexed, uncertain, since thou art out of sight,
As he, in his swooning ears, the choir's amen.
Belovèd, dost thou love? or did I see all
The glory as I dreamed, and fainted when
Too vehement light dilated my ideal,
For my soul's eyes? Will that light come again,
As now these tears come — falling hot and real?

XXXI

Thou comest ! all is said without a word.
 I sit beneath thy looks, as children do
 In the noon-sun, with souls that tremble through
 Their happy eyelids from an unaverred
 Yet prodigal inward joy. Behold, I erred
 In that last doubt ! and yet I cannot rue
 The sin most, but the occasion — that we two
 Should for a moment stand unministered
 By a mutual presence. Ah, keep near and close,
 Thou dovelike help ! and, when my fears would rise,
 With thy broad heart serenely interpose:
 Brood down with thy divine sufficiencies
 These thoughts which tremble when bereft of those,
 Like callow birds left desert to the skies.

XXXII

The first time that the sun rose on thine oath
 To love me, I looked forward to the moon
 To slacken all those bonds which seemed too soon
 And quickly tied to make a lasting troth.
 Quick-loving hearts, I thought, may quickly loathe;
 And, looking on myself, I seemed not one
 For such man's love ! — more like an out-of-tune
 Worn viol, a good singer would be wroth
 To spoil his song with, and which, snatched in haste,
 Is laid down at the first ill-sounding note.
 I did not wrong myself so, but I placed
 A wrong on *thee*. For perfect strains may float
 'Neath master-hands, from instruments defaced,—
 And great souls, at one stroke, may do and dote.

XXXIII

Yes, call me by my pet-name ! let me hear
The name I used to run at, when a child,
From innocent play, and leave the cow-slips piled,
To glance up in some face that proved me dear
With the look of its eyes. I miss the clear
Fond voices which, being drawn and reconciled
Into the music of Heaven's undefiled,
Call me no longer. Silence on the bier,
While I call God — call God ! — So let thy mouth
Be heir to those who are now exanimate.
Gather the north flowers to complete the south,
And catch the early love up in the late.
Yes, call me by that name, — and I, in truth,
With the same heart, will answer and not wait.

XXXIV

With the same heart, I said, I'll answer thee
As those, when thou shalt call me by my name —
Lo, the vain promise ! is the same, the same,
Perplexed and ruffled by life's strategy ?
When called before, I told how hastily
I dropped my flowers or brake off from a game,
To run and answer with the smile that came
At play last moment, and went on with me
Through my obedience. When I answer now,
I drop a grave thought, break from solitude;
Yet still my heart goes to thee — ponder how —
Not as to a single good, but all my good —
Lay thy hand on it, best one, and allow
That no child's foot could run fast as this blood.

XXXV

If I leave all for thee, wilt thou exchange
And be all to me ? Shall I never miss
Home-talk and blessing and the common kiss
That comes to each in turn, nor count it strange,
When I look up, to drop on a new range
Of walls and floors, another home than this ?
Nay, wilt thou fill that place by me which is
Filled by dead eyes too tender to know change ?
That's hardest. If to conquer love, has tried,
To conquer grief, tries more, as all things prove;
For grief indeed is love and grief beside.
Alas, I have grieved so I am hard to love.
Yet love me—wilt thou ? Open thine heart wide,
And fold within the wet wings of thy dove.

XXXVI

When we met first and loved, I did not build
Upon the event with marble. Could it mean
To last, a love set pendulous between
Sorrow and sorrow ? Nay, I rather thrilled,
Distrusting every light that seemed to gild
The onward path, and feared to overlean
A finger even. And, though I have grown serene
And strong since then, I think that God has willed
A still renewable fear . . . O love, O troth . . .
Lest these enclaspèd hands should never hold,
This mutual kiss drop down between us both
As an unowned thing, once the lips being cold.
And Love, be false ! if *he*, to keep one oath,
Must lose one joy, by his life's star foretold.

XXXVII

Pardon, oh, pardon, that my soul should make,
Of all that strong divineness which I know
For thine and thee, an image only so
Formed of the sand, and fit to shift and break.
It is that distant years which did not take
Thy sovrantry, recoiling with a blow,
Have forced my swimming brain to undergo
Their doubt and dread, and blindly to forsake
The purity of likeness and distort
Thy worthiest love to a worthless counterfeit:
As if a shipwrecked Pagan, safe in port,
His guardian sea-god to commemorate,
Should set a sculptured porpoise, gills a-snort
And vibrant tail, within the temple-gate.

XXXVIII

First time he kissed me, he but only kissed
The fingers of this hand wherewith I write;
And ever since, it grew more clean and white,
Slow to world-greetings, quick with its "Oh, list,"
When the angels speak. A ring of amethyst
I could not wear here, plainer to my sight,
Than that first kiss. The second passed in height
The first, and sought the forehead, and half missed,
Half falling on the hair. O beyond meed!
That was the chrism of love, which love's own crown,
With sanctifying sweetness, did precede.
The third upon my lips was folded down
In perfect, purple state; since when, indeed,
I have been proud and said, "My love, my own."

XXXIX

Because thou hast the power and own'st the grace
To look through and behind this mask of me
(Against which years have beat thus blanchingly
With their rains), and behold my soul's true face,
The dim and weary witness of life's race,
Because thou hast the faith and love to see,
Through that same soul's distracting lethargy,
The patient angel waiting for a place
In the new Heavens,—because nor sin nor woe,
Nor God's infliction, nor death's neighbourhood,
Nor all which others viewing, turn to go,
Nor all which makes me tired of all, self-viewed,—
Nothing repels thee, . . . dearest, teach me so
To pour out gratitude, as thou dost good !

XL

Oh, yes ! they love through all this world of ours !
I will not gainsay love, called love forsooth.
I have heard love talked in my early youth,
And since, not so long back but that the flowers
Then gathered, smell still. Mussulmans and Giaours
Throw kerchiefs at a smile, and have no ruth
For any weeping. Polypheme's white tooth
Slips on the nut if, after frequent showers,
The shell is over-smooth,—and not so much
Will turn the thing called love, aside to hate
Or else to oblivion. But thou art not such
A lover, my Belovèd ! thou canst wait
Through sorrow and sickness, to bring souls to touch,
And think it soon when others cry "Too late."

XLI

I thank all who have loved me in their hearts,
 With thanks and love from mine. Deep thanks to all
 Who paused a little near the prison-wall
 To hear my music in its louder parts
 Ere they went onward, each one to the mart's
 Or temple's occupation, beyond call.
 But thou, who, in my voice's sink and fall,
 When the sob took it, thy divinest Art's
 Own instrument didst drop down at thy foot
 To hearken what I said between my tears,—
 Instruct me how to thank thee ! Oh, to shoot
 My soul's full meaning into future years,
 That *they* should lend it utterance, and salute
 Love that endures, from Life that disappears !

XLII

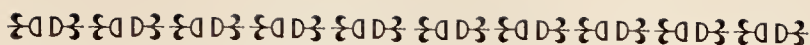
"My future will not copy fair my past" —
 I wrote that once; and thinking at my side
 My ministering life-angel justified
 The word by his appealing look upcast
 To the white throne of God, I turned at last,
 And there, instead, saw thee, not unallied
 To angels in thy soul ! Then I, long tried
 By natural ills, received the comfort fast,
 While budding, at thy sight, my pilgrim's staff
 Gave out green leaves with morning dews impearled.
 I seek no copy now of life's first half:
 Leave here the pages with long musing curled,
 And write me new my future's epigraph,
 New angel mine, unhopèd for in the world !

XLIII

How do I love thee ? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints, — I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life ! — and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

XLIV

Belovèd, thou hast brought me many flowers
Plucked in the garden, all the summer through
And winter, and it seemed as if they grew
In this close room, nor missed the sun and showers.
So, in the like name of that love of ours,
Take back these thoughts which here unfolded too,
And which on warm and cold days I withdrew
From my heart's ground. Indeed, those beds and bowers
Be overgrown with bitter weeds and rue,
And wait thy weeding; yet here's eglantine,
Here's ivy ! — take them, as I used to do
Thy flowers, and keep them where they shall not pine.
Instruct thine eyes to keep their colours true,
And tell thy soul, their roots are left in mine.



VII—*DAVID GRAY*

[1838-1861]

THIS forgotten poet, whose short life was a pathetic promise rather than a great fulfilment, died of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-four. The first of eight children, he was born in a handloom-weaver's cottage on the banks of the Luggie, a few miles from Edinburgh. Early destined for the ministry by his parents, in spite of their poverty, he received a solid grounding at the parish school and then managed, under much hardship, to spend four terms at Glasgow University. But the plan for entering the church was given up as he became increasingly absorbed in poetry and almost obsessed with his dreams of poetic fame. While tutoring or teaching intermittently during his late teens he turned out quantities of verse which was quite good for his years but by no means a justification of the extreme self-confidence which he soon began to exhibit. To various prominent authors whom he had never even seen he wrote boldly to explain his genius and to request them to help him publish his poems. In a letter to Sydney Dobell he declared: "I tell you that, if I live, my name and fame shall be second to few of any age, and to none of my own. I speak thus because I *feel* power. Nor is this feeling an artificial disease, as it was in Rousseau, but a feeling which has grown with me since ever I could think."

Gray was particularly anxious to have his long descriptive idyll, *The Luggie*, (which contains some lovely passages) published, and when all efforts had failed, he and his young friend Robert Buchanan decided to take London by storm. But London did not prove submissive, and after several months of cold quarters and poor food David returned home, almost dead with tuberculosis. He re-

mained there only a short time as a few kind friends, who appreciated the dangers of a Scotch winter for one in his condition, provided funds for sending him to Brompton Hospital. So again Gray went southward; but while brooding on the horrors of living among sickly and dying people, he lost all courage and fled home—for the last time.

There, in the weaver's cottage beside the Luggie, nursed by his mother, David Gray spent ten months, as nearly serene as his fevered, frustrated spirit was capable of being. He could not cease to regret that his little volume of poems had not been published, and he could not cease to regret that he had not seen Italy. But "they whom the gods love, die young," he liked to say, and there was constantly before his mind the early end of Keats. While thus waiting patiently he wrote *In the Shadows*, a poem in sonnets, sadly imperfect, but a true swan-song with the very ring of death about it.

Through the agency of Sydney Dobell *The Luggie and Other Poems* was sent to the printers. On the second of December, 1861, Gray received a specimen page. It was "good news," he said, and on the next day he died.

DAVID GRAY
IN THE SHADOWS
A Poem in Sonnets

181

INDUCTION

Enter, scared mortal ! and in awe behold
The chancel of a dying poet's mind,
Hung round, ah ! not adorned, with pictures bold
And quaint, but roughly touched for the refined.
The chancel, not the charnel house ! For I
To God have raised a shrine immaculate
Therein, whereon His name to glorify,
And daily mercies meekly celebrate.
So in, scared breather ! here no hint of death —
Skull or cross-bones suggesting sceptic fear;
Yea, rather calmer beauty, purer breath
Inhaled from a diviner atmosphere.

I

If it must be; if it must be, O God !
That I die young, and make no further moans;
That, underneath the unrespective sod,
In unescutcheoned privacy, my bones
Shall crumble soon, — then give me strength to bear
The last convulsive throe of too sweet breath !
I tremble from the edge of life, to dare
The dark and fatal leap, having no faith,
No glorious yearning for the Apocalypse;
But like a child that in the night-time cries
For light, I cry; forgetting the eclipse
Of knowledge and our human destinies.
O peevish and uncertain soul ! obey
The law of life in patience till the Day.

II

“Whom the gods love die young.” The thought is old;
And yet it soothed the sweet Athenian mind.
I take it with all pleasure, overbold,
Perhaps, yet to its virtue much inclined
By an inherent love for what is fair.
This is the utter poetry of woe —
That the bright-flashing gods should cure despair
By love, and make youth precious here below.
I die, being young; and, dying, could become
A pagan, with the tender Grecian trust.
Let death, the fell anatomy, benumb
The hand that writes, and fill my mouth with dust, —
Chant no funeral theme, but, with a choral
Hymn, O ye mourners ! hail immortal youth auroral !

III

With the tear-worthy four, consumption killed
In youthful prime, before the nebulous mind
Had its symmetric shapeliness defined,
Had its transcendent destiny fulfilled. —
May future ages grant me gracious room,
With Pollok, in the voiceless solitude
Finding his holiest rapture, happiest mood;
Poor White for ever poring o’er the tomb;
With Keats, whose lucid fancy mounting far
Saw heaven as an intenser, a more keen
Redintegration of the Beauty seen
And felt by all the breathers on this star;
With gentle Bruce, flinging melodious blame
On the Future for an uncompleted name.

IV

Oh many a time with Ovid have I borne
My father's vain, yet well-meant reprimand,
To leave the sweet-air'd, clover-purpled land
Of rhyme, — its Lares loftily forlorn,
With all their pure humanities unworn, —
To batten on the bare Theologies !
To quench a glory lighted at the skies,
Fed on one essence with the silver morn,
Were of all blasphemies the most insane.
So deeper given to the delicious spell
I clung to thee, heart-soothing Poesy !
Now on a sick-bed rack'd with arrowy pain
I lift white hands of gratitude, and cry,
Spirit of God in Milton ! was it well ?

V

Last night, on coughing slightly with sharp pain,
There came arterial blood, and with a sigh
Of absolute grief I cried in bitter vein,
That drop is my death-warrant: I must die.
Poor meagre life is mine, meagre and poor !
Rather a piece of childhood thrown away;
An adumbration faint; the overture
To stifled music; year that ends in May;
The sweet beginning of a tale unknown;
A dream unspoken; promise unfulfilled;
A morning with no noon, a rose unblown, —
All its deep rich vermilion crushed and killed
I' th' bud by frost: — Thus in false fear I cried,
Forgetting that to abolish death Christ died.

VI

Sweetly, my mother ! Go not yet away —
I have not told my story. Oh, not yet,
With the fair past before me, can I lay
My cheek upon the pillow to forget.
O sweet, fair past, my twenty years of youth
Thus thrown away, not fashioning a man;
But fashioning a memory, forsooth !
More feminine than follower of Pan.
O God ! let me not die for years and more !
Fulfil Thyself, and I will live then surely
Longer than a mere childhood. Now heart-sore,
Weary, with being weary — weary, purely.
In dying, mother, I can find no pleasure
Except in being near thee without measure.

VII

Hew Atlas for my monument; upraise
A pyramid for my tomb, that, undestroyed
By rank, oblivion, and the hungry void,
My name shall echo through prospective days.
O careless conqueror ! cold, abysmal grave !
Is it not sad — is it not sad, my heart —
To smother young ambition, and depart
Unhonoured and unwilling, like death's slave ?
No rare immortal remnant of my thought
Embalms my life; no poem, firmly reared
Against the shock of time, ignobly feared, —
But all my life's progression come to nought.
Hew Atlas ! build a pyramid in a plain !
Oh, cool the fever burning in my brain !

VIII

From this entangling labyrinthine maze
Of doctrine, creed, and theory; from vague
Vain speculations; the detested plague
Of spiritual pride, and vile affrays
Sectarian, good Lord, deliver me !
Nature ! thy placid monitory glory
Shines uninterrogated, while the story
Goes round of this and that theology,
This creed, and that, till patience close the list.
Once more on Carronben's wind-shrilling height
To sit in sovereign solitude, and quite
Forget the hollow world, — a pantheist
Beyond Bonaventura ! This were cheer
Passing the tedious tale of shallow pulpiter.

IX

A vale of tears, a wilderness of woe,
A sad unmeaning mystery of strife;
Reason with Passion strives, and Feeling ever
Battles with Conscience, clear eyed arbiter.
Thus spake I in sad mood not long ago,
To my dear father, of this human life,
Its jars and phantasies. Soft answered he,
With soul of love strong as a mountain river:
We make ourselves. Son, you are what you are
Neither by fate nor providence nor cause
External: all unformed humanity
Waiteth the stamp of individual laws;
And as you love and act, the plastic spirit
Doth the impression evermore inherit.

X

Last Autumn we were four, and travelled far
With Phoebe in her golden plenilune,
O'er stubble-fields where sheaves of harvest boon
Stood slanted. Many a clear and steadfast star
Twinkled its radiance thro' crisp-leaved beeches,
Over the farm to which, with snatches rare
Of ancient ballads, songs, and saucy speeches,
He hurried, happy mad. Then each had there
A dove-eyed sister pining for him, four
Fair ladies legacied with loveliness,
Chaste as a group of stars, or lilies blown
In rural nunnery. O God ! Thy sore
Strange ways expound. Two to the grave have gone
Without apparent reason more or less.

XI

Now, while the long-delaying ash assumes
The delicate April green, and, loud and clear,
Through the cool, yellow, mellow twilight glooms,
The thrush's song enchants the captive ear;
Now, while a shower is pleasant in the falling,
Stirring the still perfume that wakes around;
Now, that doves mourn, and from the distance calling,
The cuckoo answers, with a sovereign sound, —
Come, with thy native heart, O true and tried !
But leave all books; for what with converse high,
Flavoured with Attic wit, the time shall glide
On smoothly, as a river floweth by,
Or as on stately pinion, through the grey
Evening, the culver cuts his liquid way.

XII

Why are all fair things at their death the fairest ?
Beauty the beautifullest in decay ?
Why doth rich sunset clothe each closing day
With ever-new apparelling the rarest ?
Why are the sweetest melodies all born
Of pain and sorrow ? Mourneth not the dove,
In the green forest gloom, an absent love ?
Leaning her breast against that cruel thorn,
Doth not the nightingale, poor bird, complain
And integrate her uncontrollable woe
To such perfection, that to hear is pain ?
Thus, Sorrow and Death — alone realities —
Sweeten their ministration, and bestow
On troublous life a relish of the skies !

XIII

And, well-belovèd, is this all, this all ?
Gone, like a vapour which the potent morn
Kills, and in killing glorifies ! I call
Through the lone night for thee, my dear first-born
Soul-fellow ! but my heart vibrates in vain.
Ah ! well I know, and often fancy forms
The weather-blown churchyard where thou art lain, —
The churchyard whistling to the frequent storms.
But down the valley, by the river side,
Huge walnut-trees — bronze-foliaged, motionless
As leaves of metal — in their shadows hid
Warm nests, low music, and true tenderness.
But thou, betrothed ! art far from me, from me.
O heart ! be merciful — I loved him utterly.

XIV

Father ! when I have passed, with deathly swoon,
Into the ghost-world, immaterial, dim,
O may nor time nor circumstance dislimn
My image from thy memory, as noon
Steals from the fainting bloom the cooling dew !
Like flower, itself completing bud and bell,
In lonely thicket, be thy sorrow true,
And in expression secret. Worse than hell
To see the grave hypocrisy, — to hear
The crocodilian sighs of summer friends
Outraging grief's assuasive, holy ends !
But thou art faithful, father, and sincere;
And in thy brain the love of me shall dwell
Like the memorial music in the curved sea-shell.

XV

From my sick-bed gazing upon the west,
Where all the bright effulgencies of day
Lay steeped in sunless vapours, raw and grey, —
Herein (methought) is mournfully exprest
The end of false ambitions, sullen doom
Of my brave hopes, Promethean desires:
Barren and perfumeless, my name expires
Like summer-day setting in joyless gloom.
Yet faint I not in sceptical dismay,
Upheld by the belief that all pure thought
Is deathless, perfect: that the truths out-wrought
By the laborious mind cannot decay,
Being evolutions of that Sovereign Mind
Akin to man's; yet orbéd, exhaustless, undefined.

XVI

The daisy-flower is to the summer sweet,
Though utterly unknown it live and die;
The spheral harmony were incomplete
Did the dew'd laverock mount no more the sky,
Because her music's linkèd sorcery
Bewitched no mortal heart to heavenly mood.
This is the law of nature, that the deed
Should dedicate its excellence to God,
And in so doing find sufficient meed.
Then why should I make these heart-burning cries,
In sickly rhyme with monid feeling rife,
For fame and temporal felicities ?
Forgetting that in holy labour lies
The scholarship severe of human life.

XVII

O God, it is a terrible thing to die
Into the inextinguishable life;
To leave this known world with a feeble cry,
All its poor jarring and ignoble strife.
O that some shadowy spectre would disclose
The Future, and the soul's confineless hunger
Satisfy with some knowledge of repose !
For here the lust of avarice waxeth stronger,
Making life hateful; youth alone is true,
Full of a glorious self-forgetfulness:
Better to die inhabiting the new
Kingdom of faith and promise, and confess,
Even in the agony and last eclipse,
Some revelation of the Apocalypse !

XVIII

Wise in his day that heathen emperor,
To whom each morrow, came a slave, and cried,
"Philip, remember thou must die"; no more.
To me such daily voice were misapplied —
Disease guests with me; and each cough, or cramp,
Or aching, like the Macedonian slave,
Is my *memento mori*. 'T is the stamp
Of God's true life to be in dying brave.
"I fear not death, but dying" — not the long
Hereafter, sweetened by immortal love;
But the quick, terrible last breath, — the strong
Convulsion. Oh, my Lord of breath above !
Grant me a quiet end, in easeful rest, —
A sweet removal, on my mother's breast.

XIX

October's gold is dim, — the forests rot,
The weary rain falls ceaseless, while the day
Is wrapp'd in damp. In mire of village way
The hedge-row leaves are stamp'd, and, all forgot,
The broodless nest sits visible in the thorn.
Autumn, among her drooping marigolds,
Weeps all her garnered sheaves, and empty folds,
And dripping orchards — plundered and forlorn.
The season is a dead one, and I die !
No more, no more for me the spring shall make
A resurrection in the earth and take
The death from out her heart — O God, I die !
The cold throat-mist creeps nearer, till I breathe
Corruption. Drop, stark night, upon my death !

XX

Die down, O dismal day ! and let me live.
And come, blue deeps ! magnificently strewn
With coloured clouds — large, light, and fugitive —
By upper winds through pompous motions blown.
Now it is death in life — a vapour dense
Creeps round my window till I cannot see
The far snow-shining mountains, and the glens
Shagging the mountain-tops. O God ! make free
This barren, shackled earth, so deadly cold, —
Breathe gently forth Thy spring, till winter flies
In rude amazement, fearful and yet bold,
While she performs her custom'd charities.
I weigh the loaded hours till life is bare —
O God ! for one clear day, a snowdrop, and sweet air !

XXI

Sometimes, when sunshine and blue sky prevail —
When spent winds sleep, and, from the budding larch,
Small birds, with incomplete, vague sweetness, hail
The unconfirmed, yet quickening life of March, —
Then say I to myself, half-eased of care,
Toying with hope as with a maiden's token, —
"This glorious, invisible fresh air
Will clear my blood till the disease be broken."
But slowly, from the wild and infinite west,
Up-sails a cloud, full-charged with bitter sleet.
The omen gives my spirit deep unrest;
I fling aside the hope, as indiscreet, —
A false enchantment, treacherous and fair, —
And sink into my habit of despair.

XXII

O Winter ! wilt thou never, never go ?
O Summer ! but I weary for thy coming;
Longing once more to hear the Luggie flow,
And frugal bees laboriously humming.
Now, the east wind diseases the infirm,
And I must crouch in corners from rough weather.
Sometimes a winter sunset is a charm —
When the fired clouds, compacted, blaze together,
And the large sun dips, red, behind the hills.
I, from my window, can behold this pleasure;
And the eternal moon, what time she fills
Her orb with argent, treading a soft measure,
With queenly motion of a bridal mood,
Through the white spaces of infinitude.

XXIII

Oh, beautiful moon ! Oh, beautiful moon ! again
Thou persecutest me until I bend
My brow, and soothe the aching of my brain.
I cannot see what handmaidens attend
Thy silver passage as the heaven clears;
For, like a slender mist, a sweet vexation
Works in my heart, till the impulsive tears
Confess the bitter pain of adoration.
Oh, too, too, beautiful moon ! lift the white shell
Of thy soft splendour through the shining air !
I own the magic power, the witching spell,
And, blinded by thy beauty, call thee fair !
Alas ! not often now thy silver horn
Shall me delight with dreams and mystic love forlorn !

XXIV

'Tis April, yet the wind retains its tooth.
I cannot venture in the biting air,
But sit and feign wild trash, and dreams uncouth,
"Stretched on the rack of a too easy chair."
And when the day has howled itself to sleep,
The lamp is lighted in my little room;
And lowly, as the tender lapwings creep,
Comes my own mother, with her love's perfume.
O living sons with living mothers ! learn
Their worth, and use them gently, with no chiding;
For youth, I know, is quick; of temper stern
Sometimes; and apt to blunder without guiding.
So was I long, but now I see her move,
Transfigured in the radiant mist of love.

XXV

Lying awake at holy eventide,
While in clear mournfulness the throstle's hymn
Hushes the night, and the great west, grown dim,
Laments the sunset's evanescent pride:
Lo ! I behold an orb of silver brightly
Grow from the fringe of sunset, like a dream
From Thought's severe infinitude, and nightly
Show forth God's glory in its sacred gleam.
Ah, Hesper ! maidenliest star that ere
Twinkled in firmament ! cool gloaming's prime
Cheerer, whose fairness maketh wondrous fair
Old pastoral, and the Spenserian rhyme:—
Thy soft seduction doth my soul enthrall
Like music, with a dying, dying fall !

XXVI

There are three bonnie Scottish melodies,
 So native to the music of my soul,
 That of its humours they seem prophecies.
 The ravishment of Chaucer was less whole,
 Less perfect, when the April nightingale
 Let itself in upon him. Surely, Lord !
 Before whom psaltery and clarichord,
 Concentual with saintly song, prevail,
 There lurks some subtle sorcery, to Thee
 And heaven akin, in each woe-burning air !
Land of the Leal, and *Bonnie Bessie Lee*,
 And *Home, Sweet Home*, the lilt of love's despair.
 Now, in remembrance even, the feeling speak,
 For lo ! a shower of grace is on my cheek.

XXVII

*Thou art wearin' awa', Jean,
 Like snaw when it's thaw, Jean;
 Thou art wearin' awa'
 To the land o' the leal.*—OLD SONG

O the impassable sorrow, mother mine !
 Of the sweet, mournful air which, clear and well,
 For me thou singest ! Never the divine
 Mahomedan harper, famous Israfel,
 Such rich enchanting luxury of woe
 Elicited from all his golden strings !
 Therefore, dear singer sad ! chant clear, and low,
 And lovingly, the bard's imaginings.
 O poet unknown ! conning thy verses o'er
 In lone, dim places, sorrowfully sweet;
 And O musician ! touching the quick core
 Of pity, when thy skilful closes meet, —
 My tears confess your witchery as they flow,
 Since I, too, *wear* away like the unenduring snow.

XXVIII

Uplift in unparticipated night
Oh indefinable Being ! far retired
From mortal ken in uncreated light:
While demonstrating glories unacquired
When shall the wavering sciences evolve
The infinite secret, Thee ? What mind shall scan
The tenour of Thy workmanship, or solve
The dark, perplexing destiny of man ?
Oh ! in the hereafter border-land of wonder,
Shall the proud world's inveterate tale be told,
The curtain of all mysteries torn asunder,
The cerements from the living soul unrolled ?
Impatient questioner, soon, soon shall death
Reveal to thee these dim phantasmata of faith.

XXIX

And thus proceeds the mode of human life
From mystery to mystery again;
From God to God, thro' grandeur, grief, and strife,
A hurried plunge into the dark inane
Whence we had lately sprung. And is't for ever ?
Ah ! sense is blind beyond the gaping clay,
And all the eyes of faith can see it never.
We know the bright-haired sun will bring the day,
Like glorious book of silent prophecy;
Majestic night assume her starry throne;
The wondrous seasons come and go: but we
Die, unto mortal ken for ever gone.
Who shall pry further ? who shall kindle light
In the dread bosom of the infinity ?

XXX

O thou of purer eyes than to behold
Uncleanness ! sift my soul, removing all
Strange thoughts, imaginings fantastical,
Iniquitous allurements manifold.
Make it into a spiritual ark ; abode
Severely sacred, perfumed, sanctified,
Wherein the Prince of Purities may abide —
The holy and eternal Spirit of God.
The gross, adhesive loathsomeness of sin,
Give me to see. Yet, O far more, far more,
That beautiful purity which the saints adore
In a consummate Paradise within
The Veil, — O Lord, upon my soul bestow,
An earnest of that purity here below.

MY EPITAPH

Below lies one whose name was traced in sand.
He died, not knowing what it was to live:
Died, while the first sweet consciousness of manhood
And maiden thought electrified his soul,
Faint beatings in the calyx of the rose.
Bewildered reader ! pass without a sigh,
In a proud sorrow ! There is life with God,
In other kingdom of a sweeter air;
In Eden every flower is blown: *Amen.*

September 27, 1861

DAVID GRAY

cottage in Surrey for a stay in Suffolk. The one reference in the published letters is the following passage under the date of October 19, to his friend, William Hardman: "When I entered the world again I found that one had quitted it who bore my name: and this filled my mind with melancholy reflections which I rarely give way to. My dear boy, fortunately, will not feel the blow as he might have under different circumstances."

In the same letter is the remark: "I am engaged getting ready a volume of poems." That volume was in the hands of the printer by the end of the year and published the following May under the title of *Modern Love and Poems of the English Roadside*. In reminiscence and remorse, in pity and horror and remembered joy, Meredith had turned his domestic catastrophe into a tragic masterpiece, which may outlive his most famous novels.

An insolent attack on *Modern Love* in *The Spectator* at once elicited from Swinburne a spirited defence which has often since been echoed: "As to execution, take almost any sonnet at random out of this series, and let any man qualified to judge for himself of metre, choice of expression, and splendid language, decide on its claims. And, after all, the test will be unfair, except as regards metrical or pictorial merit; every section of this great progressive poem being connected with the other by links of the finest and most studied workmanship. Take for example, the noble sonnet, beginning

We saw the swallows gathering in the skies,

a more perfect piece of writing no man alive has ever turned out." And to quote from a later critic, G. M. Trevelyan: "The merit of *Modern Love* lies in no small degree in its variety. Psychology, comedy, tragedy, irony, philosophy and beauty follow upon each other's heels in such quick succession, that scarcely, except by a certain greater master, has a single tune been played upon so many stops."

It is true that the sixteen line divisions of *Modern Love* are not properly sonnets but they have usually been called so since Swinburne's comment—at least "mock" or "caudated sonnets," and as Meredith himself did not object to the term, there does not seem to be much academic advantage in changing it now. Of course it is also true that Meredith wrote a number of sonnets in the traditional manner, one of which, "Lucifer in Starlight," is among the finest in the nineteenth century.

MODERN LOVE

I

By this he knew she wept with waking eyes:
That, at his hand's light quiver by her head,
The strange low sobs that shook their common bed
Were called into her with a sharp surprise,
And strangled mute, like little gaping snakes,
Dreadfully venomous to him. She lay
Stone-still, and the long darkness flowed away
With muffled pulses. Then, as midnight makes
Her giant heart of Memory and Tears
Drink the pale drug of silence, and so beat
Sleep's heavy measure, they from head to feet
Were moveless, looking through their dead black years,
By vain regret scrawled over the blank wall.
Like sculptured effigies they might be seen
Upon their marriage-tomb, the sword between;
Each wishing for the sword that severs all.

II

It ended, and the morrow brought the task.
Her eyes were guilty gates, that let him in
By shutting all too zealous for their sin:
Each sucked a secret, and each wore a mask.
But, oh, the bitter taste her beauty had !
He sickened as at breath of poison-flowers:
A languid humour stole among the hours,
And if their smiles encountered, he went mad,
And raged deep inward, till the light was brown
Before his vision, and the world forgot,
Looked wicked as some old dull murder-spot.
A star with lurid beams, she seemed to crown
The pit of infamy: and then again
He fainted on his vengeance, and strove
To ape the magnanimity of love,
And smote himself, a shuddering heap of pain.

III

This was the woman; what now of the man ?
But pass him. If he comes beneath a heel,
He shall be crushed until he cannot feel,
Or, being callous, haply till he can.
But he is nothing: — nothing ? Only mark
The rich light striking out from her on him !
Ha ! what a sense it is when her eyes swim
Across the man she singles, leaving dark
All else ! Lord God, who mad'st the thing so fair,
See that I am drawn to her even now !
It cannot be such harm on her cool brow
To put a kiss ? Yet if I meet him there !
But she is mine ! Ah, no ! I know too well
I claim a star whose light is overcast:
I claim a phantom-woman in the Past.
The hour has struck, though I heard not the bell !

IV

All other joys of life he strove to warm,
And magnify, and catch them to his lip:
But they had suffered shipwreck with the ship,
And gazed upon him sallow from the storm.
Or if Delusion came, 'twas but to show
The coming minute mock the one that went.
Cold as a mountain in its star-pitched tent,
Stood high Philosophy, less friend than foe:
Whom self-caged Passion, from its prison-bars,
Is always watching with a wondering hate.
Not till the fire is dying in the grate,
Look we for any kinship with the stars.
Oh, wisdom never comes when it is gold,
And the great price we pay for it full worth:
We have it only when we are half earth.
Little avails that coinage to the old !

V

A message from her set his brain aflame.
A world of household matters filled her mind,
Wherein he saw hypocrisy designed:
She treated him as something that is tame,
And but at other provocation bites.
Familiar was her shoulder in the glass,
Through that dark rain: yet it may come to pass
That a changed eye finds such familiar sights
More keenly tempting than new loveliness.
The 'What has been' a moment seemed his own:
The splendours, mysteries, dearer because known,
Nor less divine: Love's inmost sacredness
Called to him, 'Come!' — In his restraining start,
Eyes nurtured to be looked at, scarce could see
A wave of the great waves of Destiny
Convulsed at a checked impulse of the heart.

VI

It chanced his lips did meet her forehead cool.
She had no blush, but slanted down her eye.
Shamed nature, then, confesses love can die:
And most she punishes the tender fool
Who will believe what honours her the most!
Dead! is it dead? She has a pulse, and flow
Of tears, the price of blood-drops, as I know,
For whom the midnight sobs around Love's ghost,
Since then I heard her, and so will sob on.
The love is here; it has but changed its aim.
O bitter barren woman! what's the name?
The name, the name, the new name thou hast won?
Behold me striking the world's coward stroke!
That will I not do, though the sting is dire.
— Beneath the surface this, while by the fire
They sat, she laughing at a quiet joke.

VII

She issues radiant from her dressing-room,
Like one prepared to scale an upper sphere:
— By stirring up a lower, much I fear !
How deftly that oiled barber lays his bloom !
That long-shanked dapper Cupid with frisked curls
Can make known women torturingly fair;
The gold-eyed serpent dwelling in rich hair,
Awakes beneath his magic whisk and twirls.
His art can take the eyes from out my head,
Until I see with eyes of other men;
While deeper knowledge crouches in its den,
And sends a spark up: — is it true we are wed ?
Yea ! filthiness of body is most vile,
But faithlessness of heart I do hold worse.
The former, it were not so great a curse
To read on the steel-mirror of her smile.

VIII

Yet it was plain she struggled, and that salt
Of righteous feeling made her pitiful.
Poor twisting worm, so queenly beautiful !
Where came the cleft between us ? whose the fault ?
My tears are on thee, that have rarely dropped
As balm for any bitter wound of mine:
My breast will open for thee at a sign !
But, no: we are two reed-pipes, coarsely stopped:
The God once filled them with his mellow breath;
And they were music till he flung them down,
Used ! used ! Hear now the discord-loving clown
Puff his gross spirit in them, worse than death !
I do not know myself without thee more:
In this unholy battle I grow base:
If the same soul be under the same face,
Speak, and a taste of that old time restore !

IX

He felt the wild beast in him betweenwhiles
So masterfully rude, that he would grieve
To see the helpless delicate thing receive
His guardianship through certain dark defiles.
Had he not teeth to rend, and hunger too ?
But still he spared her. Once: 'Have you no fear ?'
He said: 'twas dusk; she in his grasp; none near.
She laughed: 'No, surely; am I not with you ?'
And uttering that soft starry 'you,' she leaned
Her gentle body near him, looking up;
And from her eyes, as from a poison-cup,
He drank until the fluttering eyelids screened.
Devilish malignant witch ! and oh, young beam
Of heaven's circle-glory ! Here thy shape
To squeeze like an intoxicating grape —
I might, and yet thou goest safe, supreme.

X

But where began the change; and what's my crime ?
The wretch condemned, who has not been arraigned,
Chafes at his sentence. Shall I, unsustained,
Drag on Love's nerveless body thro' all time ?
I must have slept, since now I wake. Prepare,
You lovers, to know Love a thing of moods:
Not like hard life, of laws. In Love's deep woods,
I dreamt of loyal Life: — the offence is there !
Love's jealous woods about the sun are curled;
At least, the sun far brighter there did beam. —
My crime is, that the puppet of a dream,
I plotted to be worthy of the world.
Oh, had I with my darling helped to mince
The facts of life, you still had seen me go
With hindward feather and with forward toe,
Her much-adored delightful Fairy Prince !

XI

Out in the yellow meadows, where the bee
Hums by us with the honey of the Spring,
And showers of sweet notes from the larks on wing,
Are dropping like a noon-dew, wander we.
Or is it now ? or was it then ? for now,
As then, the larks from running rings pour showers:
The golden foot of May is on the flowers,
And friendly shadows dance upon her brow.
What's this, when Nature swears there is no change
To challenge eyesight ? Now, as then, the grace
Of heaven seems holding earth in its embrace.
Nor eyes, nor heart, has she to feel it strange ?
Look, woman, in the West. There wilt thou see
An amber cradle near the sun's decline:
Within it, featured even in death divine,
Is lying a dead infant, slain by thee.

XII

Not solely that the Future she destroys,
And the fair life which in the distance lies
For all men, beckoning out from dim rich skies:
Nor that the passing hour's supporting joys
Have lost the keen-edged flavour, which begat
Distinction in old times, and still should breed
Sweet Memory, and Hope, — earth's modest seed,
And heaven's high-prompting: not that the world is flat
Since that soft-luring creature I embraced,
Among the children of Illusion went:
Methinks with all this loss I were content,
If the mad Past, on which my foot is based,
Were firm, or might be blotted: but the whole
Of life is mixed: the mocking Past will stay:
And if I drink oblivion of a day,
So shorten I the stature of my soul.

XIII

'I play for Seasons; not Eternities !'
Says Nature, laughing on her way. 'So must
All those whose stake is nothing more than dust !'
And lo, she wins, and of her harmonies
She is full sure ! Upon her dying rose,
She drops a look of fondness, and goes by,
Scarce any retrospection in her eye;
For she the laws of growth most deeply knows,
Whose hands bear, here, a seed-bag — there, an urn.
Pledges she herself to aught, 'twould mark her end !
This lesson of our only visible friend,
Can we not teach our foolish hearts to learn ?
Yes ! yes ! — but, oh, our human rose is fair
Surpassingly ! Lose calmly Love's great bliss,
When the renewed for ever of a kiss
Whirls life within the shower of loosened hair !

XIV

What soul would bargain for a cure that brings
Contempt the nobler agony to kill ?
Rather let me bear on the bitter ill,
And strike this rusty bosom with new stings !
It seems there is another veering fit,
Since on a gold-haired lady's eyeballs pure,
I looked with little prospect of a cure,
The while her mouth's red bow loosed shafts of wit.
Just heaven ! can it be true that jealousy
Has decked the woman thus ? and does her head
Swim somewhat for possessions forfeited ?
Madam, you teach me many things that be.
I open an old book, and there I find
That 'Women still may love whom they deceive.'
Such love I prize not, madam: by your leave,
The game you play at is not to my mind.

XV

I think she sleeps: it must be sleep, when low
Hangs that abandoned arm toward the floor;
The face turned with it. Now make fast the door.
Sleep on: it is your husband, not your foe.
The Poet's black stage-lion of wronged love,
Frights not our modern dames: — well if he did !
Now will I pour new light upon that lid,
Full-sloping like the breasts beneath. 'Sweet dove,
Your sleep is pure. Nay, pardon: I disturb.
I do not ? good !' Her waking infant-stare
Grows woman to the burden my hands bear:
Her own handwriting to me when no curb
Was left on Passion's tongue. She trembles through;
A woman's tremble — the whole instrument: —
I show another letter lately sent.
The words are very like: the name is new.

XVI

In our old shipwrecked days there was an hour,
When in the firelight steadily aglow,
Joined slackly, we beheld the red chasm grow
Among the clicking coals. Our library-bower
That eve was left to us: and hushed we sat
As lovers to whom Time is whispering.
From sudden-opened doors we heard them sing:
The nodding elders mixed good wine with chat.
Well knew we that Life's greatest treasure lay
With us, and of it was our talk. 'Ah, yes !
Love dies !' I said: I never thought it less.
She yearned to me that sentence to unsay.
Then when the fire domed blackening, I found
Her cheek was salt against my kiss, and swift
Up the sharp scale of sobs her breast did lift: —
Now am I haunted by that taste ! that sound !

XVII

At dinner, she is hostess, I am host.
 Went the feast ever cheerfuller ? She keeps
 The Topic over intellectual deeps
 In buoyancy afloat. They see no ghost.
 With sparkling surface-eyes we ply the ball:
 It is in truth a most contagious game:
 HIDING THE SKELETON, shall be its name.
 Such play as this the devils might appal !
 But here's the greater wonder; in that we,
 Enamoured of an acting nought can tire,
 Each other, like true hypocrites, admire;
 Warm-lighted looks, Love's ephemerioe,
 Shoot gaily o'er the dishes and the wine.
 We waken envy of our happy lot.
 Fast, sweet, and golden, shows the marriage-knot.
 Dear guests, you now have seen Love's corpse-light shine.

XVIII

Here Jack and Tom are paired with Moll and Meg.
 Curved open to the river-reach is seen
 A country merry-making on the green.
 Fair space for signal shakings of the leg.
 That little screwy fiddler from his booth,
 Whence flows one nut-brown stream, commands the joints
 Of all who caper here at various points.
 I have known rustic revels in my youth:
 The May-fly pleasures of a mind at ease.
 An early goddess was a county lass:
 A charmed Amphion-oak she tripped the grass.
 What life was that I lived ? The life of these ?
 Heaven keep them happy ! Nature they seem near.
 They must, I think, be wiser than I am;
 They have the secret of the bull and lamb.
 'Tis true that when we trace its source, 'tis beer.

XIX

No state is enviable. To the luck alone
Of some few favoured men I would put claim.
I bleed, but her who wounds I will not blame.
Have I not felt her heart as 'twere my own
Beat thro' me ? could I hurt her ? heaven and hell !
But I could hurt her cruelly ! Can I let
My Love's old time-piece to another set,
Swear it can't stop, and must for ever swell ?
Sure, that's one way Love drifts into the mart
Where goat-legged buyers throng. I see not plain :—
My meaning is, it must not be again.
Great God ! the maddest gambler throws his heart.
If any state be enviable on earth,
'Tis yon born idiot's, who, as days go by,
Still rubs his hands before him, like a fly,
In a queer sort of meditative mirth.

XX

I am not of those miserable males
Who sniff at vice, and, daring not to snap,
Do therefore hope for heaven. I take the hap
Of all my deeds. The wind that fills my sails,
Propels; but I am helmsman. Am I wrecked,
I know the devil has sufficient weight
To bear: I lay it not on him, or fate.
Besides, he's damned. That man I do suspect
A coward, who would burden the poor deuce
With what ensues from his own slipperiness.
I have just found a wanton-scented tress
In an old desk, dusty for lack of use.
Of days and nights it is demonstrative,
That, like some aged star, gleam luridly.
If for those times I must ask charity,
Have I not any charity to give ?

XXI

We three are on the cedar-shadowed lawn;
My friend being third. He who at love once laughed,
Is in the weak rib by a fatal shaft
Struck through, and tells his passion's bashful dawn
And radiant culmination, glorious crown,
When 'this' she said: went 'thus': most wondrous she.
Our eyes grow white, encountering: that we are three,
Forgetful; then together we look down.
But he demands our blessing; is convinced
That words of wedded lovers must bring good.
We question; if we dare! or if we should!
And pat him, with light laugh. We have not winced.
Next, she has fallen. Fainting points the sign
To happy things in wedlock. When she wakes,
She looks the star that thro' the cedar shakes:
Her lost moist hand clings mortally to mine.

XXII

What may the woman labour to confess?
There is about her mouth a nervous twitch.
'Tis something to be told, or hidden: — which?
I get a glimpse of hell in this mild guess.
She has desires of touch, as if to feel
That all the household things are things she knew.
She stops before the glass. What sight in view?
A face that seems the latest to reveal!
For she turns from it hastily, and tossed
Irresolute, steals shadow-like to where
I stand; and wavering pale before me there,
Her tears fall still as oak-leaves after frost.
She will not speak. I will not ask. We are
League-sundered by the silent gulf between.
You burly lovers on the village green,
Yours is a lower, and a happier star!

XXIII

'Tis Christmas weather, and a country house
Receives us: rooms are full: we can but get
An attic-crib. Such lovers will not fret
At that, it is half-said. The great carouse
Knocks hard upon the midnight's hollow door,
But when I knock at hers, I see the pit.
Why did I come here in that dullard fit?
I enter, and lie couched upon the floor.
Passing, I caught the coverlet's quick beat:—
Come, Shame, burn to my soul! and Pride, and Pain—
Foul demons that have tortured me, enchain!
Out in the freezing darkness the lambs bleat.
The small bird stiffens in the low starlight.
I know not how, but shuddering as I slept,
I dreamed a banished angel to me crept:
My feet were nourished on her breasts all night.

XXIV

The misery is greater, as I live!
To know her flesh so pure, so keen her sense,
That she does penance now for no offence,
Save against Love. The less can I forgive!
The less can I forgive, though I adore
That cruel lovely pallor which surrounds
Her footsteps; and the low vibrating sounds
That come on me, as from a magic shore.
Low are they, but most subtle to find out
The shrinking soul. Madam, 'tis understood
When women play upon their womanhood;
It means, a Season gone. And yet I doubt
But I am duped. That nun-like look waylays
My fancy. Oh! I do but wait a sign!
Pluck out the eyes of pride! thy mouth to mine!
Never! though I die thirsting. Go thy ways!

XXV

You like not that French novel ? Tell me why.
You think it quite unnatural. Let us see.
The actors are, it seems, the usual three:
Husband, and wife, and lover. She—but fie !
In England we'll not hear of it. Edmond,
The lover, her devout chagrin doth share;
Blanc-mange and absinthe are his penitent fare,
Till his pale aspect makes her over-fond:
So, to preclude fresh sin, he tries rosbif.
Meantime the husband is no more abused:
Auguste forgives her ere the tear is used.
Then hangeth all on one tremendous IF:—
If she will choose between them. She does choose;
And takes her husband, like a proper wife.
Unnatural ? My dear, these things are life:
And life, some think, is worthy of the Muse.

XXVI

Love ere he bleeds, an eagle in high skies,
Has earth beneath his wings: from reddened eve
He views the rosy dawn. In vain they weave
The fatal web below while far he flies.
But when the arrow strikes him, there's a change.
He moves but in the track of his spent pain,
Whose red drops are the links of a harsh chain,
Binding him to the ground, with narrow range.
A subtle serpent then has Love become.
I had the eagle in my bosom erst:
Henceforward with the serpent I am cursed.
I can interpret where the mouth is dumb.
Speak, and I see the side-lie of a truth.
Perchance my heart may pardon you this deed:
But be no coward:—you that made Love bleed,
You must bear all the venom of his tooth !

XXVII

Distraction is the panacea, Sir !
I hear my oracle of Medicine say.
Doctor ! that same specific yesterday
I tried, and the result will not deter
A second trial. Is the devil's line
Of golden hair, or raven black, composed ?
And does a cheek, like any sea-shell rosed,
Or clear as widowed sky, seem most divine ?
No matter, so I taste forgetfulness.
And if the devil snare me, body and mind,
Here gratefully I score:—he seemèd kind,
When not a soul would comfort my distress !
O sweet new world, in which I rise new made !
O Lady, once I gave love: now I take !
Lady, I must be flattered. Shouldst thou wake
The passion of a demon, be not afraid.

XXVIII

I must be flattered. The imperious
Desire speaks out. Lady, I am content
To play with you the game of Sentiment,
And with you enter on paths perilous;
But if across your beauty I throw light,
To make it threefold, it must be all mine.
First secret; then avowed. For I must shine
Envied,—I, lessened in my proper sight !
Be watchful of your beauty, Lady dear !
How much hangs on that lamp you cannot tell.
Most earnestly I pray you, tend it well:
And men shall see me as a burning sphere;
And men shall mark you cyeing me, and groan
To be the God of such a grand sunflower !
I feel the promptings of Satanic power,
While you do homage unto me alone.

XXIX

Am I failing ? For no longer can I cast
A glory round about this head of gold.
Glory she wears, but springing from the mould;
Not like the consecration of the Past !
Is my soul beggared ? Something more than earth
I cry for still: I cannot be at peace
In having Love upon a mortal lease.
I cannot take the woman at her worth !
Where is the ancient wealth wherewith I clothed
Our human nakedness, and could endow
With spiritual splendour a white brow
That else had grinned at me the fact I loathed ?
A kiss is but a kiss now ! and no wave
Of a great flood that whirls me to the sea.
But, as you will ! we'll sit contentedly,
And eat our pot of honey on the grave.

XXX

What are we first ? First, animals; and next
Intelligences at a leap; on whom
Pale lies the distant shadow of the tomb,
And all that draweth on the tomb for text.
Into which state comes Love, the crowning sun:
Beneath whose light the shadow loses form.
We are the lords of life, and life is warm.
Intelligence and instinct now are one.
But nature says: 'My children most they seem
When they least know me: therefore I decree
That they shall suffer.' Swift doth young Love flee,
And we stand wakened, shivering from our dream.
Then if we study Nature we are wise.
Thus do the few who live but with the day:
The scientific animals are they.—
Lady, this is my sonnet to your eyes.

XXXI

This golden head has wit in it. I live
Again, and a far higher life, near her.
Some women like a young philosopher;
Perchance because he is diminutive.
For woman's manly god must not exceed
Proportions of the natural nursing size.
Great poets and great sages draw no prize
With women: but the little lap-dog breed,
Who can be hugged, or on a mantel-piece
Perched up for adoration, these obtain
Her homage. And of this we men are vain ?
Of this ! 'Tis ordered for the world's increase !
Small flattery ! Yet she has that rare gift
To beauty, Common Sense. I am approved.
It is not half so nice as being loved,
And yet I do prefer it. What's my drift ?

XXXII

Full faith I have she holds that rarest gift
To beauty, Common Sense. To see her lie
With her fair visage an inverted sky
Bloom-covered, while the underlids uplift,
Would almost wreck the faith; but when her mouth
(Can it kiss sweetly ? sweetly !) would address
The inner me that thirsts for her no less,
And has so long been languishing in drouth,
I feel that I am matched; that I am man !
One restless corner of my heart or head,
That holds a dying something never dead,
Still frets, though Nature giveth all she can.
It means, that woman is not, I opine,
Her sex's antidote. Who seeks the asp
For serpent's bites ? 'Twould calm me could I clasp
Shrieking Bacchantes with their souls of wine !

XXXIII

'In Paris, at the Louvre, there have I seen
 The sumptuously-feathered angel pierce
 Prone Lucifer, descending. Looked he fierce,
 Showing the fight a fair one? Too serene!
 The young Pharsalians did not disarray
 Less willingly their locks of floating silk:
 That suckling mouth of his, upon the milk
 Of heaven might still be feasting through the fray.
 Oh, Raphael! when men the Fiend do fight,
 They conquer not upon such easy terms.
 Half serpent in the struggle grow these worms
 And does he grow half human, all is right.'
 This to my Lady in a distant spot,
 Upon the theme: *While mind is mastering clay,*
Gross clay invades it. If the spy you play,
 My wife, read this! Strange love talk, is it not?

XXXIV

Madam would speak with me. So, now it comes:
 The Deluge or else Fire! She's well; she thanks
 My husbandship. Our chain on silence clanks.
 Time leers between, above his twiddling thumbs.
 Am I quite well? Most excellent in health!
 The journals, too, I diligently peruse.
 Vesuvius is expected to give news:
 Niagara is no noisier. By stealth
 Our eyes dart scrutinizing snakes. She's glad
 I'm happy, says her quivering under-lip.
 'And are not you?' 'How can I be?' 'Take ship!
 For happiness is somewhere to be had.'
 'Nowhere for me!' Her voice is barely heard.
 I am not melted, and make no pretence.
 With commonplace I freeze her, tongue and sense.
 Niagara or Vesuvius is deferred.

XXXV

It is no vulgar nature I have wived.
Secretive, sensitive, she takes a wound
Deep to her soul, as if the sense had swooned,
And not a thought of vengeance had survived.
No confidences has she: but relief
Must come to one whose suffering is acute.
O have a care of natures that are mute !
They punish you in acts: their steps are brief.
What is she doing ? What does she demand
From Providence or me ? She is not one
Long to endure this torpidly, and shun
The drugs that crowd about a woman's hand.
At Forfeits during snow we played, and I
Must kiss her. 'Well performed !' I said: then she:
' 'Tis hardly worth the money, you agree ?'
Save her ? What for ? To act this wedded lie !

XXXVI

My Lady unto Madam makes her bow.
The charm of women is, that even while
You're probed by them for tears, you yet may smile,
Nay, laugh outright, as I have done just now.
The interview was gracious: they anoint
(To me aside) each other with fine praise:
Discriminating compliments they raise,
That hit with wondrous aim on the weak point:
My Lady's nose of Nature might complain.
It is not fashioned aptly to express
Her character of large-browed steadfastness.
But Madam says: Thereof she may be vain !
Now, Madam's faulty feature is a glazed
And inaccessible eye, that has soft fires,
Wide gates, at love-time only. This admires
My Lady. At the two I stand amazed.

XXXVII

Along the garden terrace, under which
A purple valley (lighted at its edge
By smoky torch-flame on the long cloud-ledge
Whereunder dropped the chariot), glimmers rich,
A quiet company we pace, and wait
The dinner-bell in prae-digestive calm.
So sweet up violet banks the Southern balm
Breathes round, we care not if the bell be late:
Though here and there grey seniors question Time
In irritable coughings. With slow foot
The low rosed moon, the face of Music mute,
Begins among her silent bars to climb.
As in and out, in silvery dusk, we thread,
I hear the laugh of Madam, and discern
My Lady's heel before me at each turn.
Our tragedy, is it alive or dead ?

XXXVIII

Give to imagination some pure light
In human form to fix it, or you shame
The devils with that hideous human game:—
Imagination urging appetite !
Thus fallen have earth's greatest Gogmagogs,
Who dazzle us, whom we can not revere:
Imagination is the charioteer
That, in default of better, drives the hogs.
So, therefore, my dear Lady, let me love !
My soul is arrowy to the light in you.
You know me that I never can renew
The bond that woman broke: what would you have ?
'Tis Love, or Vileness ! not a choice between,
Save petrification ! What does Pity here ?
She killed a thing, and now it's dead, 'tis dear.
Oh, when you counsel me, think what you mean !

XXXIX

She yields: my Lady in her noblest mood
Has yielded: she, my golden-crownèd rose !
The bride of every sense ! more sweet than those
Who breathe the violet breath of maidenhood.
O visage of still music in the sky !
Soft moon ! I feel thy song, my fairest friend !
True harmony within can apprehend
Dumb harmony without. And hark ! 'tis nigh !
Belief has struck the note of sound: a gleam
Of living silver shows me where she shook
Her long white fingers down the shadowy brook,
That sings her song, half waking, half in dream.
What two come here to mar this heavenly tune ?
A man is one: the woman bears my name,
And honour. Their hands touch ! Am I still tame ?
God, what a dancing spectre seems the moon !

XL

I bade my Lady think what she might mean.
Know I my meaning, I ? Can I love one,
And yet be jealous of another ? None
Commits such folly. Terrible Love, I ween,
Has might, even dead, half sighing to upheave
The lightless seas of selfishness amain:
Seas that in a man's heart have no rain
To fall and still them. Peace can I achieve,
By turning to this fountain-source of woe,
This woman, who's to Love as fire to wood ?
She breathed the violet breath of maidenhood
Against my kisses once ! but I say, No !
The thing is mocked at ! Helplessly afloat,
I know not what I do, whereto I strive,
The dread that my old love may be alive,
Has seized my nursling new love by the throat.

XLI

How many a thing which we cast to the ground,
When others pick it up becomes a gem !
We grasp at all the wealth it is to them;
And by reflected light its worth is found.
Yet for us still 'tis nothing ! and that zeal
Of false appreciation quickly fades.
This truth is little known to human shades,
How rare from their own instinct 'tis to feel !
They waste the soul with spurious desire,
That is not the ripe flame upon the bough.
We two have taken up a lifeless vow
To rob a living passion: dust for fire !
Madam is grave, and eyes the clock that tells
Approaching midnight. We have struck despair
Into two hearts. O, look we like a pair
Who for fresh nuptials joyfully yield all else ?

XLII

I am to follow her. There is much grace
In woman when thus bent on martyrdom.
They think that dignity of soul may come,
Perchance, with dignity of body. Base !
But I was taken by that air of cold
And statuesque sedateness, when she said
'I'm going'; lit a taper, bowed her head,
And went, as with the stride of Pallas bold.
Fleshly indifference horrible ! The hands
Of Time now signal: O, she's safe from me !
Within those secret walls what do I see ?
Where first she set the taper down she stands:
Not Pallas: Hebe shamed ! Thoughts black as death,
Like a stirred pool in sunshine break. Her wrists
I catch: she faltering, as she half resists,
'You love . . . ? love . . . ? love . . . ?' all on an in-
drawn breath.

XLIII

Mark where the pressing wind shoots javelin-like,
Its skeleton shadow on the broad-backed wave !
Here is a fitting spot to dig Love's grave;
Here where the ponderous breakers plunge and strike,
And dart their hissing tongues high up the sand:
In hearing of the ocean, and in sight
Of those ribbed wind-streaks running into white.
If I the death of Love had deeply planned,
I never could have made it half so sure,
As by the unblest kisses which upbraid
The full-waked sense; or failing that, degrade !
'Tis morning: but no morning can restore
What we have forfeited. I see no sin:
The wrong is mixed. In tragic life, God wot,
No villain need be ! Passions spin the plot:
We are betrayed by what is false within.

XLIV

They say, that Pity in Love's service dwells,
A porter at the rosy temple's gate.
I missed him going: but it is my fate
To come upon him now beside his wells;
Whereby I know that I Love's temple leave,
And that the purple doors have closed behind.
Poor soul ! if in those early days unkind,
Thy power to sting had been but power to grieve,
We now might with an equal spirit meet,
And not be matched like innocence and vice.
She for the Temple's worship has paid price,
And takes the coin of Pity as a cheat.
She sees through simulation to the bone:
What's best in her impels her to the worst:
Never, she cries, shall Pity soothe Love's thirst,
Or foul hypocrisy for truth atone !

XLV

It is the season of the sweet wild rose,
My Lady's emblem in the heart of me !
So golden-crownèd shines she gloriously,
And with that softest dream of blood she glows:
Mild as an evening heaven round Hesper bright !
I pluck the flower, and smell it, and revive
The time when in her eyes I stood alive.
I seem to look upon it out of Night.
Here's Madam, stepping hastily. Her whims
Bid her demand the flower, which I let drop.
As I proceed, I feel her sharply stop,
And crush it under heel with trembling limbs.
She joins me in a cat-like way, and talks
Of company, and even condescends
To utter laughing scandal of old friends.
These are the summer days, and these our walks.

XLVI

At last we parley: we so strangely dumb
In such a close communion ! It befell
About the sounding of the *Matin*-bell,
And lo ! her place was vacant, and the hum
Of loneliness was round me. Then I rose,
And my disordered brain did guide my foot
To that old wood where our first love-salute
Was interchanged: the source of many throes !
There did I see her, not alone. I moved
Toward her, and made proffer of my arm.
She took it simply, with no rude alarm;
And that disturbing shadow passed reproved.
I felt the pained speech coming, and declared
My firm belief in her, ere she could speak.
A ghastly morning came into her cheek,
While with a widening soul on me she stared.

XLVII

We saw the swallows gathering in the sky,
And in the osier-isle we heard them noise.
We had not to look back on summer joys,
Or forward to a summer of bright dye:
But in the largeness of the evening earth
Our spirits grew as we went side by side.
The hour became her husband and my bride.
Love that had robbed us so, thus blessed our dearth !
The pilgrims of the year waxed very loud
In multitudinous chatterings, as the flood
Full brown came from the West, and like pale blood
Expanded to the upper crimson cloud.
Love that had robbed us of immortal things,
This little moment mercifully gave,
Where I have seen across the twilight wave
The swan sail with her young beneath her wings.

XLVIII

Their sense is with their senses all mixed in,
Destroyed by subtleties these women are !
More brain, O Lord, more brain ! or we shall mar
Utterly this fair garden we might win.
Behold ! I looked for peace, and thought it near.
Our inmost hearts had opened, each to each.
We drank the pure daylight of honest speech.
Alas ! that was the fatal draught, I fear.
For when of my lost Lady came the word,
This woman, O this agony of flesh !
Jealous devotion bade her break the mesh,
That I might seek that other like a bird.
I do adore the nobleness ! despise
The act ! She has gone forth, I know not where.
Will the hard world my sentence of her share ?
I feel the truth ; so let the world surmise.

XLIX

He found her by the ocean's moaning verge,
Nor any wicked change in her discerned;
And she believed his old love had returned,
Which was her exultation, and her scourge.
She took his hand, and walked with him, and seemed
The wife he sought, though shadow-like and dry.
She had one terror, lest her heart should sigh,
And tell her loudly she no longer dreamed.
She dared not say, 'This is my breast: look in.'
But there's a strength to help the desperate weak.
That night he learned how silence best can speak
The awful things when Pity pleads for Sin.
About the middle of the night her call
Was heard, and he came wondering to the bed.
'Now kiss me, dear ! it may be, now !' she said.
Lethe had passed those lips, and he knew all.

L

Thus piteously Love closed what he begat:
The union of this ever-diverse pair !
These two were rapid falcons in a snare,
Condemned to do the flitting of the bat.
Lovers beneath the singing sky of May,
They wandered once; clear as the dew on flowers:
But they fed not on the advancing hours:
Their hearts held cravings for the buried day.
Then each applied to each that fatal knife,
Deep questioning, which probes to endless dole.
Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul
When hot for certainties in this our life ! —
In tragic hints here see what evermore
Moves dark as yonder midnight ocean's force,
Thundering like ramping hosts of warrior horse,
To throw that fain thin line upon the shore !



[1807-1882]

COMPARING the gaunt features of the Florentine with the placid countenance of the American Tennyson, it seems strange to find the name of Dante recur continually in the letters and journals of Longfellow. Yet not so strange after all, for he was primarily the poetic scholar, the gracious Harvard professor steeped in the literatures of Europe and most apt to feel deeply in the presence of another's words.

As early as 1838, soon after he came to Cambridge, Longfellow was lecturing on Dante and making translations of noteworthy passages for use in class; some of them were published in his first volume of poems, *Voices of the Night*. In 1843, a few weeks before his second marriage, he was beginning the day with Dante: "I write a few lines every day before breakfast. It is the first thing I do,—the morning prayer, the keynote of the day." Ten years later, when he was forty-six and almost at the height of his fame he noted in the journal: "In weariness of spirit and despair of writing anything original, I turned again, today, to dear old Dante, and resumed my translation of the *Purgatorio* where I left it in 1843. I find great delight in the work. It diffused its benediction through the day." But it was not until after his wife's pathetic death in 1861, when he was already sorrowing over the outbreak of the Civil War, that he turned desperately to Dante; and for more than five years he was absorbed in completing and annotating his translation of the *Divine Comedy*. The final revision was discussed before the weekly meetings of the Dante Club, a small group of Longfellow's close friends in Cambridge, and as a result what warmth and unity of spirit there might have been in

the translation was fatally impaired by too much scholarly assistance. But we are largely compensated for that loss by a group of six sonnets which Longfellow wrote during those dark years. They were originally published as fly-leaves to the three parts of his translation. It is these sonnets, with a number of others, which now give Longfellow high rank among those who scorn most of his famous household verse.

DIVINA COMMEDIA

I

Oft have I seen at some cathedral door
A laborer, pausing in the dust and heat,
Lay down his burden, and with reverent feet
Enter, and cross himself, and on the floor
Kneel to repeat his paternoster o'er;
Far off the noises of the world retreat;
The loud vociferations of the street
Become an undistinguishable roar.
So, as I enter here from day to day,
And leave my burden at this minster gate,
Kneeling in prayer, and not ashamed to pray,
The tumult of the time disconsolate
To inarticulate murmurs dies away,
While the eternal ages watch and wait.

II

How strange the sculptures that adorn these towers !
This crowd of statues, in whose folded sleeves
Birds build their nests; while canopied with leaves
Parvis and portal bloom like trellised bowers,
And the vast minster seems a cross of flowers !
But fiends and dragons on the gargoyled eaves
Watch the dead Christ between the living thieves,
And, underneath, the traitor Judas lowers !
Ah ! from what agonies of heart and brain,
What exultations trampling on despair,
What tenderness, what tears, what hate of wrong,
What passionate outcry of a soul in pain,
Uprose this poem of the earth and air,
This mediaeval miracle of song !

III

I enter, and I see thee in the gloom
Of the long aisles, O poet saturnine !
And strive to make my steps keep pace with thine.
The air is filled with some unknown perfume;
The congregation of the dead make room
For thee to pass; the votive tapers shine;
Like rooks that haunt Ravenna's groves of pine
The hovering echoes fly from tomb to tomb.
From the confessionals I hear arise
Rehearsals of forgotten tragedies,
And lamentations from the crypts below;
And then a voice celestial that begins
With the pathetic words, "Although your sins
As scarlet be," and ends with "as the snow."

IV

With snow-white veil and garments as of flame,
She stands before thee, who so long ago
Filled thy young heart with passion and the woe
From which thy song and all its splendors came;
And while with stern rebuke she speaks thy name,
The ice about thy heart melts as the snow
On mountain heights, and in swift overflow
Comes gushing from thy lips in sobs of shame.
Thou makest full confession; and a gleam,
As of the dawn on some dark forest cast,
Seems on thy lifted forehead to increase;
Lethe and Eunoë — the remembered dream
And the forgotten sorrow — bring at last
That perfect pardon which is perfect peace.

V

I lift mine eyes, and all the windows blaze
With forms of Saints and holy men who died,
Here martyred and hereafter glorified;
And the great Rose upon its leaves displays
Christ's Triumph, and the angelic roundelays,
With splendor upon splendor multiplied;
And Beatrice again at Dante's side
No more rebukes, but smiles her words of praise.
And then the organ sounds, and unseen choirs
Sing the old Latin hymns of peace and love
And benedictions of the Holy Ghost;
And the melodious bells among the spires
O'er all the house-tops and through heaven above
Proclaim the elevation of the Host !

VI

O star of morning and of liberty !
O bringer of the light, whose splendor shines
Above the darkness of the Apennines,
Forerunner of the day that is to be !
The voices of the city and the sea,
The voices of the mountains and the pines,
Repeat thy song, till the familiar lines
Are footpaths for the thought of Italy !
Thy flame is blown abroad from all the heights,
Through all the nations, and a sound is heard,
As of a mighty wind, and men devout,
Strangers of Rome, and the new proselytes,
In their own language hear thy wondrous word,
And many are amazed and many doubt.

"Her Reproach," "The Ruined Maid," "Heiress and Architect," and the four sonnets called "She, to Him" ("part of a much larger number which perished"). One of the sonnets, which Hardy liked particularly, was lost by an editor; it began with the line, "Many a one has loved as much as I."

SHE, TO HIM

I

When you shall see me in the toils of Time,
My lauded beauties carried off from me,
My eyes no longer stars as in their prime,
My name forgot of Maiden Fair and Free;

When, in your being, heart concedes to mind,
And judgment, though you scarce its process know,
Recalls the excellencies I once enshrined,
And you are irked that they have withered so;

Remembering mine the loss is, not the blame,
That Sportsman Time but rears his brood to kill,
Knowing me in my soul the very same —
One who would die to spare you touch of ill ! —
Will you not grant to old affections's claim
The hand of friendship down Life's sunless hill ?

II

Perhaps, long hence, when I have passed away,
Some other's feature, accent, thought like mine,
Will carry you back to what I used to say,
And bring some memory of your love's decline.

Then you may pause awhile and think, "Poor jade !"
And yield a sigh to me — as ample due,
Not as the tittle of a debt unpaid
To one who could resign her all to you —

And thus reflecting, you will never see
That your thin thought, in two small words conveyed,
Was no such fleeting phantom-thought to me,
But the Whole Life wherein my part was played;
And you amid its fitful masquerade
A Thought — as I in your life seem to be !

III

I will be faithful to thee; aye, I will !
And Death shall choose me with a wondering eye
That he did not discern and domicile
One his by right ever since that last Good-bye !

I have no care for friends, or kin, or prime
Of manhood who deal gently with me here;
Amid the happy people of my time
Who work their love's fulfilment, I appear

Numb as a vane that cankers on its point,
True to the wind that kissed ere canker came:
Despised by souls of Now, who would disjoint
The mind from memory, making Life all aim,

My old dexterities in witchery gone,
And nothing left for Love to look upon.

IV

This love puts all humanity from me;
I can but maledict her, pray her dead,
For giving love and getting love of thee —
Feeding a heart that else mine own had fed !

How much I love I know not, life not known,
Save as one unit I would add love by;
But this I know, my being is but thine own —
Fused from its separateness by ecstasy.

And thus I grasp thy amplitudes, of her
Ungrasped, though helped by nigh-regarding eyes;
Canst thou then hate me as an envier
Who see unrecked what I so dearly prize ?
Believe me, Lost One, Love is lovelier
The more it shapes its moan in selfish-wise.

XI—DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

[1828-1882]

A MAN of the south, sensual, indolent and richly versatile, exiled in the narrow, scrambling, specialised life of a northern city; a mystic without a creed; a Catholic without the discipline or consolation of the Church; a life between the rocks and the high road, like the scrub of a southern hillside, sombre, aromatic and impenetrable.”¹ It would seem impossible to characterize more happily the strange, ambiguous figure who was Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Contradictory, extravagant, metaphorical language must be used about him—and must leave him largely untouched, out of reach. Long before his death he had become a legend and the legends still continue to accumulate.

His father, Gabriele Rossetti, a poet and Dante scholar, was a political exile from Naples, who settled in London in 1824 and married Frances Mary Polidori, the sister of Byron’s physician. The Rossetti household was for years a meeting-place of all sorts of eccentric, erudite Italians, involved in mysterious schemes for liberating their country. Of the four children, Maria Francesca (1827-1882), the eldest, was the least well known; extremely intelligent and devout, she did some translating from the Italian, wrote a good critical book called a *A Shadow of Dante*, and spent her last years in an Anglican sisterhood. Dante Gabriel, the second child, was born the year before his brother, William Michael Rossetti, who became a distinguished critic and biographer of the whole Pre-Raphaelite Movement. Christina Georgina deserves almost as high a rank in poetry as her much more famous brother.

To recall briefly the familiar outlines of Rossetti’s

¹ Evelyn Waugh: Rossetti, His Life and Work, p. 13.

career: he began to draw, paint, and write verse in early childhood; entered art school at fourteen; founded the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood at twenty, with Holman Hunt and Millais; published *The Blessed Damozel* and other early poems in the shortlived Pre-Raphaelite magazine, *The Germ*; and slowly won recognition as a painter while Ruskin was busily changing the plastic taste of the English public. Rossetti was twenty-two when he met the beautiful Elizabeth Siddall, assistant in a milliner's shop, whom he painted many times and married, after a decade of procrastination. Two years later she died from an overdose of laudanum, in all probability taken in despair at his amatory wanderings. Overwhelmed with grief and remorse, he buried the manuscript of his poems in her coffin and wrote no more for five years, but plunged into his greatest period of painting.

Rossetti was forty, in 1868, when he again turned to poetry and wrote several of his best sonnets, including the "Willowwood" group. The following year, on the insistence of friends, he permitted his manuscript to be exhumed, although as Megroz says, "not much more than 'Jenny' and 'A Last Confession' would have suffered seriously if the exhumation had not taken place." And of *The House of Life* particularly not more than a dozen sonnets would have been lost, for of the one hundred and three in the final version, nearly three fourths were written during 1868-71 and at least ten still later. Thus the usual notion that *The House of Life* was one long devotion to Elizabeth Siddall is very far from the truth. However deep the sorrow she inspired in Rossetti, other loves and other troubles had come to him since her death—and *The House of Life* is more nearly a gallery than a single portrait.

As a preliminary step, sixteen of the sonnets were published in *The Fortnightly Review* in 1869 and "in 1870, there tardily appeared, after such expectation and tiptoe curiosity as have preceded no other book in our generation,

the *Poems* of Gabriel Rossetti.”¹ This included *Sonnets and Songs Towards a Work to be called The House of Life*, with fifty of the sonnets. The favorable chorus of criticism was broken by Robert Buchanan’s notorious attack on “The Fleshly School of Poetry,” which wounded Rossetti deeply. The year before his death Rossetti brought out his second volume of original poetry, *Ballads and Sonnets*, with *The House of Life* increased to one hundred and two sonnets, and one, “Nuptial Sleep,” which had especially offended Buchanan, deleted.

A considerable literature has grown up around Rossetti’s poetry, from Swinburne’s early defense and Pater’s excellent essay reprinted in *Appreciations*, to the recent study by R. L. Mégroz and P. F. Baum’s meticulous volume entirely devoted to *The House of Life*. It is hardly necessary to repeat the numerous encomia which rank Rossetti’s sequence with, if not ahead of, Shakespeare’s. Certainly *The House of Life* is an amazing series of variations on the themes of love and despair and death — an immortal pilgrimage through the twilight regions of the human soul where there is no truth but beauty and no eloquence but silence.

¹ Edmund Gosse.

THE HOUSE OF LIFE

*A Sonnet is a moment's monument,—
 Memorial from the Soul's eternity
 To one dead deathless hour. Look that it be,
 Whether for lustral rite or dire portent,
 Of its own arduous fulness reverent:
 Carve it in ivory or in ebony,
 As Day or Night may rule; and let Time see
 Its flowering crest impearled and orient.*

*A Sonnet is a coin: its face reveals
 The soul,—its converse, to what Power 'tis due:—
 Whether for tribute to the august appeals
 Of Life, or dower in Love's high retinue,
 It serve, or, 'mid the dark wharf's cavernous breath,
 In Charon's palm it pay the toll to Death.*

PART I—YOUTH AND CHANGE

I

LOVE ENTHRONED

I marked all kindred Powers the heart finds fair:—
 Truth, with awed lips; and Hope, with eyes upcast;
 And Fame, whose loud wings fan the ashen Past
 To signal-fires, Oblivion's flight to scare;
 And Youth, with still some single golden hair
 Unto his shoulder clinging, since the last
 Embrace wherein two sweet arms held him fast;
 And Life, still wreathing flowers for Death to wear.

Love's throne was not with these; but far above
 All passionate wind of welcome and farewell
 He sat in breathless bowers they dream not of;
 Though Truth foreknow Love's heart, and Hope foretell,
 And Fame be for Love's sake desirable,
 And Youth be dear, and Life be sweet to Love.

II

BRIDAL BIRTH

As when desire, long darkling, dawns, and first
The mother looks upon the newborn child,
Even so my Lady stood at gaze and smiled
When her soul knew at length the Love it nursed.
Born with her life, creature of poignant thirst
And exquisite hunger, at her heart Love lay
Quickening in darkness, till a voice that day
Cried on him, and the bonds of birth were burst.

Now, shielded in his wings, our faces yearn
Together, as his fullgrown feet now range
The grove, and his warm hands our couch prepare:
Till to his song our bodiless souls in turn
Be born his children, when Death's nuptial change
Leaves us for light the halo of his hair.

III

LOVE'S TESTAMENT

O thou who at Love's hour ecstatically
Unto my heart dost ever more present,
Clothed with his fire, thy heart his testament;
Whom I have neared and felt thy breath to be
The inmost incense of his sanctuary;
Who without speech hast owned him, and, intent
Upon his will, thy life with mine hast blent,
And murmured, "I am thine, thou'rt one with me!"

O what from thee the grace, to me the prize,
And what to Love the glory, — when the whole
Of the deep stair thou tread'st to the dim shoal
And weary water of the place of sighs,
And there dost work deliverance, as thine eyes
Draw up my prisoned spirit to thy soul!

IV

LOVESIGHT

When do I see thee most, beloved one ?
When in the light the spirits of mine eyes
Before thy face, their altar, solemnize
The worship of that Love through thee made known ?
Or when in the dusk hours, (we two alone,)
Close-kissed and eloquent of still replies
Thy twilight-hidden glimmering visage lies,
And my soul only sees thy soul its own ?

O love, my love ! if I no more should see
Thyself, nor on the earth the shadow of thee,
Nor image of thine eyes in any spring, —
How then should sound upon Life's darkening slope
The ground-whirl of the perished leaves of Hope,
The wind of Death's imperishable wing ?

V

HEART'S HOPE

By what word's power, the key of paths untrod,
Shall I the difficult deeps of Love explore,
Till parted waves of Song yield up the shore
Even as that sea which Israel crossed dryshod ?
For lo ! in some poor rhythmic period,
Lady, I fain would tell how evermore
Thy soul I know not from thy body, nor
Thee from myself, neither our love from God.

Yea, in God's name, and Love's, and thine, would I
Draw from one loving heart such evidence
As to all hearts all things shall signify;
Tender as dawn's first hill-fire, and intense
As instantaneous penetrating sense,
In Spring's birth-hour, of other Springs gone by.

VI

THE KISS

What smouldering senses in death's sick delay
Or seizure of malign vicissitude
Can rob this body of honour, or denude
This soul of wedding-raiment worn to-day ?
For lo ! even now my lady's lips did play
With these my lips such consonant interlude
As laurelled Orpheus longed for when he wooed
The half-drawn hungering face with that last lay.

I was a child beneath her touch, — a man
When breast to breast we clung, even I and she, —
A spirit when her spirit looked through me, —
A god when all our life-breath met to fan
Our life-blood, till love's emulous ardours ran,
Fire within fire, desire in deity.

VII

NUPTIAL SLEEP

At length their long kiss severed, with sweet smart:
And as the last slow sudden drops are shed
From sparkling eaves when all the storm has fled,
So singly flagged the pulses of each heart.
Their bosoms sundered, with the opening start
Of married flowers to either side outspread
From the knit stem; yet still their mouths, burnt red,
Fawned on each other where they lay apart.

Sleep sank them lower than the tide of dreams,
And their dreams watched them sink, and slid away.
Slowly their souls swam up again, through gleams
Of watered light and dull drowned waifs of day;
Till from some wonder of new woods and streams
He woke, and wondered more: for there she lay.

VIII

SUPREME SURRENDER

To all the spirits of Love that wander by
Along his love-sown harvest-field of sleep
My lady lies apparent; and the deep
Calls to the deep; and no man sees but I.
The bliss so long afar, at length so nigh,
Rests there attained. Methinks proud Love must weep
When Fate's control doth from his harvest reap
The sacred hour for which the years did sigh.

First touched, the hand now warm around my neck
Taught memory long to mock desire: and lo !
Across my breast the abandoned hair doth flow,
Where one shorn tress long stirred the longing ache:
And next the heart that trembled for its sake
Lies the queen-heart in sovereign overthrow.

IX

LOVE'S LOVERS

Some ladies love the jewels in Love's zone,
And gold-tipped darts he hath for painless play
In idle scornful hours he flings away;
And some that listen to his lute's soft tone
Do love to vaunt the silver praise their own;
Some prize his blindfold sight; and there be they
Who kissed his wings which brought him yesterday
And thank his wings today that he is flown.

My lady only loves the heart of Love:
Therefore Love's heart, my lady, hath for thee
His bower of unimagined flower and tree:
There kneels he now, and all-anhungered of
Thine eyes gray-lit in shadowing hair above,
Seals with thy mouth his immortality.

X

PASSION AND WORSHIP

One flame-winged brought a white-winged harp-player
Even where my lady and I lay all alone;
Saying: "Behold, this minstrel is unknown;
Bid him depart, for I am minstrel here:
Only my strains are to Love's dear ones dear."
Then said I: "Through thine hautboy's rapturous tone
Unto my lady still this harp makes moan,
And still she deems the cadence deep and clear."

Then said my lady: "Thou art Passion of Love,
And this Love's Worship: both he plights to me.
Thy mastering music walks the sunlit sea:
But where wan water trembles in the grove
And the wan moon is all the light thereof,
This harp still makes my name its voluntary."

XI

THE PORTRAIT

O Lord of all compassionate control,
O Love ! let this my lady's picture glow
Under my hand to praise her name, and show
Even of her inner self the perfect whole:
That he who seeks her beauty's furthest goal,
Beyond the light that the sweet glances throw
And reflux wave of the sweet smile, may know
The very sky and sea-line of her soul.

Lo ! it is done. Above the long lithe throat
The mouth's mould testifies of voice and kiss
The shadowed eyes remember and foresee.
Her face is made her shrine. Let all men note
That in all years (O Love, thy gift is this !)
They that would look on her must come to me,

XII

THE LOVE-LETTER

Warmed by her hand and shadowed by her hair
As close she leaned and poured her heart through thee,
Whereof the articulate throbs accompany
The smooth black stream that makes thy whiteness fair, —
Sweet fluttering sheet, even of her breath aware, —
Oh let thy silent song disclose to me
That soul wherewith her lips and eyes agree
Like married music in Love's answering air.

Fain had I watched her when, at some fond thought,
Her bosom to the writing closelier press'd,
And her breast's secrets peered into her breast;
When, through eyes raised an instant, her soul sought
My soul, and from the sudden confluence caught
The words that made her love the loveliest.

XIII

THE LOVERS' WALK

Sweet twining hedgeflowers wind-stirred in no wise
On this June day; and hand that clings in hand: —
Still glades; and meeting faces scarcely fann'd: —
An osier-odored stream that draws the skies
Deep to its heart; and mirrored eyes in eyes: —
Fresh hourly wonder o'er the Summer land
Of light and cloud; and two souls softly spann'd
With one o'erarching heaven of smiles and sighs: —

Even such their path, whose bodies lean unto
Each other's visible sweetness amorously, —
Whose passionate hearts lean by Love's high decree
Together on his heart for ever true,
As the cloud-foaming firmamental blue
Rests on the blue line of a foamless sea.

XIV

YOUTH'S ANTIPHONY

"I love you, sweet: how can you ever learn
How much I love you?" "You I love even so,
And so I learn it." "Sweet, you cannot know
How fair you are." "If fair enough to earn
Your love, so much is all my love's concern."
"My love grows hourly, sweet." "Mine too doth grow,
Yet love seemed full so many hours ago!"
Thus lovers speak, till kisses claim their turn.

Ah! happy they to whom such words as these
In youth have served for speech the whole day long,
Hour after hour, remote from the world's throng,
Work, contest, fame, all life's confederate pleas,—
What while Love breathed in sighs and silences
Through two blent souls one rapturous undersong.

XV

YOUTH'S SPRING-TRIBUTE

On this sweet bank your head thrice sweet and dear
I lay, and spread your hair on either side,
And see the newborn woodflowers bashful-eyed
Look through the golden tresses here and there.
On these debateable borders of the year
Spring's foot half falters; scarce she yet may know
The leafless blackthorn-blossom from the snow;
And through her bowers the wind's way still is clear.

But April's sun strikes down the glades to-day;
So shut your eyes upturned, and feel my kiss
Creep, as the Spring now thrills through every spray,
Up your warm throat to your warm lips: for this
Is even the hour of Love's sworn suit-service,
With whom cold hearts are counted castaway.

XVI

THE BIRTH-BOND

Have you not noted, in some family
Where two were born of a first marriage-bed,
How still they own their gracious bond, though fed
And nursed on the forgotten breast and knee ? —
How to their father's children they shall be
In act and thought of one goodwill; but each
Shall for the other have, in silence speech,
And in a word complete community ?

Even so, when first I saw you, seemed it, love,
That among souls allied to mine was yet
One nearer kindred than life hinted of.
O born with me somewhere that men forget,
And though in years of sight and sound unmet,
Known for my soul's birth-partner well enough !

XVII

A DAY OF LOVE

Those envied places which do know her well,
And are so scornful of this lonely place,
Even now for once are emptied of her grace:
Nowhere but here she is: and while Love's spell
From his predominant presence doth compel
All alien hours, an outworn populace,
The hours of Love fill full the echoing space
With sweet confederate music favourable.

Now many memories make solicitous
The delicate love-lines of her mouth, lit
With quivering fire, the words take wing from it;
As here between our kisses we sit thus
Speaking of things remembered, and so sit
Speechless while things forgotten call to us.

XVIII

BEAUTY'S PAGEANT

What dawn-pulse at the heart of heaven, or last
Incarnate flower of culminating day, —
What marshalled marvels on the skirts of May,
Or song full-quired, sweet June's encomiast;
What glory of change by nature's hand amass'd
Can vie with all those moods of varying grace
Which o'er one loveliest woman's form and face
Within this hour, within this room, have pass'd ?

Love's very vesture and elect disguise
Was each fine movement, — wonder new-begot
Of lily or swan or swan-stemmed *galiot*;
Joy to his sight who now the sadlier sighs,
Parted again; and sorrow yet for eyes
Unborn, that read these words and saw her not.

XIX

GENIUS IN BEAUTY

Beauty like hers is genius. Not the call
Of Homer's or of Dante's heart sublime, —
Not Michael's hand furrowing the zones of time, —
Is more with compassed mysteries musical;
Nay, not in Spring's Summer's sweet footfall
More gathered gifts exuberant Life bequeaths
Than doth this sovereign face, whose love-spell breathes
Even from its shadowed contour on the wall.

As many men are poets in their youth,
But for one sweet-strung soul the wires prolong
Even through all change the indomitable song;
So in likewise the envenomed years, whose tooth
Rends shallower grace with ruin void of ruth,
Upon this beauty's power shall wreak no wrong.

XX

SILENT NOON

Your hands lie open in the long fresh grass, —
The finger-points look through like rosy blooms:
Your eyes smile peace. The pasture gleams and glooms
'Neath billowing skies that scatter and amass.
All round our nest, far as the eye can pass,
Are golden kingcup-fields with silver edge
Where the cow-parsley skirts the hawthorn-hedge.
'Tis visible silence, still as the hour-glass.

Deep in the sun-searched growths the dragon-fly
Hangs like a blue thread loosened from the sky: —
So this wing'd hour is dropt to us from above.
Oh ! clasp we to our hearts, for deathless dower,
This close-companioned inarticulate hour
When twofold silence was the song of love.

XXI

GRACIOUS MOONLIGHT

Even as the moon grows queenlier in mid-space
When the sky darkens, and her cloud-rapt car
Thrills with intenser radiance from afar, —
So lambent, lady, beams thy sovereign grace
When the drear soul desires thee. Of that face
What shall be said, — which, like a governing star,
Gathers and garners from all things that are
Their silent penetrative loveliness ?

O'er water-daisies and wild waifs of Spring,
There where the iris rears its gold-crowned sheaf
With flowering rush and sceptred arrow-leaf,
So have I marked Queen Dian, in bright ring
Of cloud above and wave below, take wing
And chase night's gloom, as thou the spirit's grief.

XXII

LOVE-SWEETNESS

Sweet dimness of her loosened hair's downfall
About thy face; her sweet hands round thy head
In gracious fostering union garlanded;
Her tremulous smiles; her glances' sweet recall
Of love; her murmuring sighs memorial;
Her mouth's culled sweetness by thy kisses shed
On cheeks and neck and eyelids, and so led
Back to her mouth which answers there for all:—

What sweeter than these things, except the thing
In lacking which all these would lose their sweet:—
The confident heart's still fervour; the swift beat
And soft subsidence of the spirit's wing,
Then when it feels, in cloud-girt wayfaring,
The breath of kindred plumes against its feet?

XXIII

HEART'S HAVEN

Sometimes she is a child within mine arms,
Cowering beneath dark wings that love must chase,—
With still tears showering and averted face,
Inexplicably filled with faint alarms:
And oft from mine own spirit's hurtling harms
I crave the refuge of her deep embrace,—
Against all ills the fortified strong place
And sweet reserve of sovereign counter-charms.

And Love, our light at night and shade at noon,
Lulls us to rest with songs, and turns away
All shafts of shelterless tumultuous day.
Like the moon's growth, his face gleams through his tune;
And as soft waters warble to the moon,
Our answering spirits chime one roundelay.

XXIV

LOVE'S BAUBLES

I stood where Love in brimming armfuls bore
Slight wanton flowers and foolish toys of fruit:
And round him ladies thronged in warm pursuit,
Fingered and lipped and proffered the strange store.
And from one hand the petal and the core
Savored of sleep; and cluster and curled shoot
Seemed from another hand like shame's salute, —
Gifts that I felt my cheek was blushing for.

At last Love bade my Lady give the same:
And as I looked, the dew was light thereon;
And as I took them, at her touch they shone
With inmost heaven-hue of the heart of flame.
And then Love said: "Lo ! when the hand is hers,
Follies of love are love's true ministers."

XXV

PRIDE OF YOUTH

Even as a child, of sorrow that we give
The dead, but little in his heart can find,
Since without need of thought to his clear mind
Their turn it is to die and his to live: —
Even so the winged New Love smiles to receive
Along his eddying plumes the auroral wind,
Nor, forward glorying, casts one look behind
Where night-rack shrouds the Old Love fugitive.

There is a change in every hour's recall,
And the last cowslip in the fields we see
On the same day with the first corn-poppy.
Alas for hourly change ! Alas for all
The loves that from his hand proud Youth lets fall,
Even as the beads of a told rosary !

XXVI

WINGED HOURS

Each hour until we meet is as a bird
That wings from far his gradual way along
The rustling covert of my soul, — his song
Still loudlier trilled through leaves more deeply stirr'd:
But at the hour of meeting, a clear word
Is every note he sings, in Love's own tongue;
Yet, Love, thou know'st the sweet strain suffers wrong,
Full oft through our contending joys unheard.

What of that hour at last, when for her sake
No wing may fly to me nor song may flow;
When, wandering round my life unleaved, I know
The bloodied feathers scattered in the brake,
And think how she, far from me, with like eyes
Sees through the untuneful bough the wingless skies ?

XXVII

MID-RAPTURE

Thou lovely and beloved, thou my love;
Whose kiss seems still the first; whose summoning eyes,
Even now, as for our love-world's new sunrise,
Shed very dawn; whose voice, attuned above
All modulation of the deep-bowered dove,
Is like a hand laid softly on the soul;
Whose hand is like a sweet voice to control
Those worn tired brows it hath the keeping of: —

What word can answer to thy word, — what gaze
To thine, which now absorbs within its sphere
My worshipping face, till I am mirrored there
Light-circled in a heaven of deep-drawn rays ?
What clasp, what kiss mine inmost heart can prove,
O lovely and beloved, O my love ?

XXVIII

HEART'S COMPASS

Sometimes thou seem'st not as thyself alone,
But as the meaning of all things that are;
A breathless wonder, shadowing forth afar
Some heavenly solstice hushed and halcyon;
Whose unstirred lips are music's visible tone;
Whose eyes the sun-gate of the soul unbar,
Being of its furthest fires oracular; —
The evident heart of all life sown and mown.

Even such Love is; and is not thy name Love ?
Yea, by thy hand the Love-god rends apart
All gathering clouds of Night's ambiguous art;
Flings them far down, and sets thine eyes above;
And simply, as some gage of flower or glove,
Stakes with a smile the world against thy heart.

XXIX

SOUL-LIGHT

What other woman could be loved like you,
Or how of you should love possess his fill ?
After the fulness of all rapture, still, —
As at the end of some deep avenue
A tender glamour of day, — there comes to view
Far in your eyes a yet more hungering thrill, —
Such fire as Love's soul-winnowing hands distil
Even from his inmost ark of light and dew.

And as the traveller triumphs with the sun,
Glorying in heat's mid-height, yet startide brings
Wonder new-born, and still fresh transport springs
From limpid lambent hours of day begun; —
Even so, through eyes and voice, your soul doth move
My soul with changeful light of infinite love.

XXX

THE MOONSTAR

Lady, I thank thee for thy loveliness,
Because my lady is more lovely still.
Glorying I gaze, and yield with glad goodwill
To thee thy tribute; by whose sweet-spun dress
Of delicate life Love labours to assess
My lady's absolute queendom; saying, "Lo !
How high this beauty is, which yet doth show
But as that beauty's sovereign votaress."

Lady, I saw thee with her, side by side;
And as, when night's fair fires their queen surround,
An emulous star too near the moon will ride, —
Even so thy rays within her luminous bound
Were traced no more; and by the light so drown'd,
Lady, not thou but she was glorified.

XXXI

LAST FIRE

Love, through your spirit and mine what summer eve
Now glows with glory of all things possess'd,
Since this day's sun of rapture filled the west
And the light sweetened as the fire took leave ?
Awhile now softlier let your bosom heave,
As in Love's harbor, even that loving breast,
All care takes refuge while we sink to rest,
And mutual dreams the bygone bliss retrieve.

Many the days that Winter keeps in store,
Sunless throughout, or whose brief sun-glimpses
Scarce shed the heaped snow through the naked trees.
This day at least was Summer's paramour,
Sun-colored to the imperishable core
With sweet well-being of love and full heart's ease.

XXXII

HER GIFTS

High grace, the dower of queens; and therewithal
 Some wood-born wonder's sweet simplicity;
 A glance like water brimming with the sky
 Or hyacinth-light where forest-shadows fall;
 Such thrilling pallor of cheek as doth enthrall
 The heart; a mouth whose passionate forms imply
 All music and all silence held thereby;
 Deep golden locks, her sovereign coronal;
 A round reared neck, meet column of Love's shrine
 To cling to when the heart takes sanctuary;
 Hands which for ever at Love's bidding be,
 And soft-stirred feet still answering to his sign: —
 These are her gifts, as tongue may tell them o'er.
 Breathe low her name, my soul; for that means more.

XXXIII

EQUAL TROTH

Not by one measure mayst thou mete our love;
 For how should I be loved as I love thee? —
 I, graceless, joyless, lacking absolutely
 All gifts that with thy queenship best behove; —
 Thou, throned in every heart's elect alcove,
 And crowned with garlands culled from every tree,
 Which for no head but thine, by Love's decree,
 All beauties and all mysteries interwove.

But here thine eyes and lips yield soft rebuke: —
 "Then only" (say'st thou) "could I love thee less,
 When thou couldst doubt my love's equality."
 Peace, sweet! If not to sum but worth we look, —
 Thy heart's transcendence, not my heart's excess, —
 Then more a thousandfold thou lov'st than I.

XXXIV

VENUS VICTRIX

Could Juno's self more sovereign presence wear
Than thou, 'mid other ladies throned in grace ? —
Or Pallas, when thou bend'st with soul-stilled face
O'er poet's page gold-shadowed in thy hair ?
Dost thou than Venus seem less heavenly fair
When o'er the sea of love's tumultuous trance
Hovers thy smile, and mingles with thy glance
That sweet voice like the last wave murmuring there ?

Before such triune loveliness divine
Awestruck I ask, which goddess here most claims
The prize that, howsoe'er adjudged, is thine ?
Then Love breathes low the sweetest of thy names;
And Venus Victrix to my heart doth bring
Herself, the Helen of thy guerdoning.

XXXV

THE DARK GLASS

Not I myself know all my love for thee:
How should I reach so far, who cannot weigh
To-morrow's dower by gage of yesterday ?
Shall birth and death, and all dark names that be
As doors and windows bared to some loud sea,
Lash deaf mine ears and blind my face with spray;
And shall my sense pierce love, — the last relay
And ultimate outpost of eternity ?

Lo ! what am I to Love, the lord of all ?
One murmuring shell he gathers from the sand, —
One little heart-flame sheltered in his hand.
Yet through thine eyes he grants me clearest call
And veriest touch of powers primordial
That any hour-girt life may understand.

XXXVI

THE LAMP'S SHRINE

Sometimes I fain would find in thee some fault,
That I might love thee still in spite of it:
Yet how should our Lord Love curtail one whit
Thy perfect praise whom most he would exalt ?
Alas ! he can but make my heart's low vault
Even in men's sight unworthier, being lit
By thee, who thereby show'st more exquisite
Like fiery chrysoprase in deep basalt.

Yet will I nowise shrink; but at Love's shrine
Myself within the beams his brow doth dart
Will set the flashing jewel of thy heart
In that dull chamber where it deigns to shine:
For lo ! in honor of thine excellencies
My heart takes pride to show how poor it is.

XXXVII

LIFE-IN-LOVE

Not in thy body is thy life at all
But in this lady's lips and hands and eyes;
Through these she yields thee life that vivifies
What else were sorrow's servant and death's thrall.
Look on thyself without her, and recall
The waste remembrance and forlorn surmise
That lived but in a dead-drawn breath of sighs
O'er vanished hours and hours eventual.

Even so much life hath the poor tress of hair
Which, stored apart, is all love hath to show
For heart-beats and for fire-heats long ago;
Even so much life endures unknown, even where,
'Mid change the changeless night environeth,
Lies all that golden hair undimmed in death.

XXXVIII

THE LOVE-MOON

'When that dead face, bowered in the furthest years,
Which once was all the life years held for thee,
Can now scarce bid the tides of memory
Cast on thy soul a little spray of tears, —
How canst thou gaze into these eyes of hers
Whom now thy heart delights in, and not see
Within each orb Love's philtred euphrasy
Make them of buried troth remembrancers ?'

'Nay, pitiful Love, nay, loving Pity ! Well
Thou knowest that in these twain I have confess'd
Two very voices of thy summoning bell.
Nay, Master, shall not Death make manifest
In these the culminant changes which approve
The love-moon that must light my soul to Love ?'

XXXIX

THE MORROW'S MESSAGE

"Thou Ghost," I said, "and is thy name To-day ? —
Yesterday's son, with such an abject brow ! —
And can To-morrow be more pale than thou ?"
While yet I spoke, the silence answered: "Yea,
Henceforth our issue is all grieved and gray,
And each beforehand makes such poor avow
As of old leaves beneath the budding bough
Or night-drift that the sundawn shreds away."

Then cried I: "Mother of many malisons,
O Earth, receive me to thy dusty bed !"
But therewithal the tremulous silence said:
"Lo ! Love yet bids thy lady greet thee once: —
Yea, twice, — whereby thy life is still the sun's;
And thrice, — whereby the shadow of death is dead."

XL

SLEEPLESS DREAMS

Girt in dark growths, yet glimmering with one star,
 O night desirous as the nights of youth !
 Why should my heart within thy spell, forsooth,
 Now beat, as the bride's finger-pulses are
 Quickened within the girdling golden bar ?
 What wings are these that fan my pillow smooth ?
 And why does Sleep, waved back by Joy and Ruth,
 Tread softly round and gaze at me from far ?

Nay, night deep-leaved ! And would Love feign in thee
 Some shadowy palpitating grove that bears
 Rest for man's eyes and music for his ears ?
 O lonely night ! art thou not known to me,
 A thicket hung with masks of mockery
 And watered with the wasteful warmth of tears ?

XLI

SEVERED SELVES

Two separate divided silences,
 Which, brought together, would find loving voice;
 Two glances which together would rejoice
 In love, now lost like stars beyond dark trees;
 Two hands apart whose touch alone gives ease;
 Two bosoms which, heart-shrined with mutual flame,
 Would, meeting in one clasp, be made the same;
 Two souls, the shores wave-mocked of sundering seas:—

Such are we now. Ah ! may our hope forecast
 Indeed one hour again, when on this stream
 Of darkened love once more the light shall gleam ? —
 An hour how slow to come, how quickly past, —
 Which blooms and fades, and only leaves at last,
 Faint as shed flowers, the attenuated dream.

XLII

THROUGH DEATH TO LOVE

Like labour-laden moonclouds faint to flee
From winds that sweep the winter-bitten wold, —
Like multiform circumfluence manifold
Of night's flood-tide, — like terrors that agree
Of hoarse-tongued fire and inarticulate sea, —
Even such, within some glass dimmed by our breath,
Our hearts discern wild images of Death,
Shadows and shoals that edge eternity.

Howbeit athwart Death's imminent shade doth soar
One Power, than flow of stream or flight of dove
Sweeter to glide around, to brood above.
Tell me, my heart, — what angel-greeted door
Or threshold of wing-winnowed threshing-floor
Hath guest fire-fledged as thine, whose lord is Love ?

XLIII

HOPE OVERTAKEN

I deemed thy garments, O my Hope, were gray,
So far I viewed thee. Now the space between
Is passed at length; and garmented in green
Even as in days of yore thou stand'st to-day.
Ah God ! and but for lingering dull dismay,
On all that road our footsteps erst had been
Even thus commingled, and our shadows seen
Blent on the hedgerows and the water-way.

O Hope of mine whose eyes are living love,
No eyes but hers, — O Love and Hope the same ! —
Lean close to me, for now the sinking sun
That warmed our feet scarce gilds our hair above.
O hers thy voice and very hers thy name !
Alas, cling round me, for the day is done !

XLIV

LOVE AND HOPE

Bless love and hope. Full many a withered year
Whirled past us, eddying to its chill doomsday;
And clasped together where the blown leaves lay,
We long have knelt and wept full many a tear.
Yet lo ! one hour at last, the Spring's compeer,
Flutes softly to us from some green byeway :
Those years, those tears are dead, but only they : —
Bless love and hope, true soul; for we are here.

Cling heart to heart; nor of this hour demand
Whether in very truth, when we are dead,
Our hearts shall wake to know Love's golden head
Sole sunshine of the imperishable land;
Or but discern, through night's unfeatured scope,
Scorn-fired at length the illusive eyes of Hope.

XLV

CLOUD AND WIND

Love, should I fear death most for you or me ?
Yet if you die, can I not follow you,
Forcing the straits of change ? Alas ! but who
Shall wrest a bond from night's inveteracy,
Ere yet my hazardous soul put forth, to be
Her warrant against all her haste might rue ? —
Ah ! in your eyes so reached what dumb adieu,
What unsunned gyres of waste eternity ?

And if I die the first, shall death be then
A lampless watchtower whence I see you weep ? —
Or (woe is me ! — a bed wherein my sleep
Ne'er notes (as death's dear cup at last you drain)
The hour when you too learn that all is vain
And that Hope sows what Love shall never reap ?

XLVI

SECRET PARTING

Because our talk was of the cloud-control
And moon-track of the journeying face of Fate,
Her tremulous kisses faltered at love's gate
And her eyes dreamed against a distant goal:
But soon, remembering her how brief the whole
Of joy, which its own hours annihilate,
Her set gaze gathered, thirstier than of late,
And as she kissed, her mouth became her soul.

Thence in what ways we wandered, and how strove
To build with fire-tried vows the piteous home
Which memory haunts and whither sleep may roam, —
They only know for whom the roof of Love
Is the still-seated secret of the grove,
Nor spire may rise nor bell be heard therefrom.

XLVII

PARTED LOVE

What shall be said of this embattled day
And armed occupation of this night
By all thy foes beleaguered, — now when sight
Nor sound denotes the loved one far away ?
Of these thy vanquished hours what shalt thou say, —
As every sense to which she dealt delight
Now labours lonely o'er the stark noon-height
To reach the sunset's desolate disarray ?

Stand still, fond fettered wretch ! while Memory's art
Parades the Past before thy face, and lures
Thy spirit to her passionate portraitures:
Till the tempestuous tide-gates flung apart
Flood with wild will the hollows of thy heart,
And thy heart rends thee, and thy body endures.

XLVIII

BROKEN MUSIC

The mother will not turn, who thinks she hears
Her nursling's speech first grow articulate;
But breathless with averted eyes elate
She sits, with open lips and open ears,
That it may call her twice. 'Mid doubts and fears
Thus oft my soul has hearkened; till the song,
A central moan for days, at length found tongue.
And the sweet music welled and the sweet tears.

But now, whatever while the soul is fain
To list that wonted murmur, as it were
The speech-bound sea-shell's low importunate strain, —
No breath of song, thy voice alone is there,
O bitterly beloved ! and all her gain
Is but the pang of unpermitted prayer.

XLIX

DEATH-IN-LOVE

There came an image in Life's retinue
That had Love's wings and bore his gonfalon:
Fair was the web, and nobly wrought thereon,
O soul-sequestered face, thy form and hue !
Bewildering sounds, such as Spring wakens to,
Shook in its folds; and through my heart its power
Sped trackless as the immemorable hour
When birth's dark portal groaned and all was new.

But a veiled woman followed, and she caught
The banner round its staff, to furl and cling, —
Then plucked a feather from the bearer's wing,
And held it to his lips that stirred it not,
And said to me, "Behold, there is no breath:
I and this Love are one, and I am Death."

L

WILLOWWOOD — I

I sat with Love upon a woodside well,
Leaning across the water, I and he;
Nor ever did he speak nor looked at me,
But touched his lute wherein was audible
The certain secret thing he had to tell:
Only our mirrored eyes met silently
In the low wave; and that sound came to be
The passionate voice I knew; and my tears fell.

And at their fall, his eyes beneath grew hers;
And with his foot and with his wing-feathers
He swept the spring that watered my heart's drouth.
Then the dark ripples spread to waving hair,
And as I stooped, her own lips rising there
Bubbled with brimming kisses at my mouth.

LI

WILLOWWOOD — 2

And now Love sang: but his was such a song,
So meshed with half-remembrance hard to free,
As souls disused in death's sterility
May sing when the new birthday tarries long.
And I was made aware of a dumb throng
That stood aloof, one form by every tree,
All mournful forms, for each was I or she,
The shades of those our days that had no tongue.

They looked on us, and knew us and were known;
While fast together, alive from the abyss,
Clung the soul-wrung implacable close kiss;
And pity of self through all made broken moan
Which said, 'For once, for once, for once alone !'
And still Love sang, and what he sang was this: —

LII

WILLOWWOOD — 3

'O ye, all ye that walk in Willowwood,
That walk with hollow faces burning white;
What fathom-depth of soul-struck widowhood,
What long, what longer hours, one lifelong night,
Ere ye again, who so in vain have wooed
Your last hope lost, who so in vain invite
Your lips to that their unforgotten food,
Ere ye, ere ye again shall see the light !

Alas ! the bitter banks in Willowwood,
With tear-spurge wan, with blood-wort burning red:
Alas ! if ever such a pillow could
Steep deep the soul in sleep till she were dead, —
Better all life forget her than this thing,
That Willowwood should hold her wandering !'

LIII

WILLOWWOOD — 4

So sang he: and as meeting rose and rose
Together cling through the wind's wellaway
Nor change at once, yet near the end of day
The leaves drop loosened where the heart-stain glows, —
So when the song died did the kiss uncloze;
And her face fell back drowned, and was as gray
As its gray eyes; and if it ever may
Meet mine again I know not if Love knows.

Only I know that I leaned low and drank
A long draught from the water where she sank,
Her breath and all her tears and all her soul:
And as I leaned, I know I felt Love's face
Pressed on my neck with moan of pity and grace,
Till both our heads were in his aureole.

LIV

WITHOUT HER

What of her glass without her ? The blank gray
There where the pool is blind of the moon's face.
Her dress without her ? The tossed empty space
Of cloud-rack whence the moon has passed away.
Her paths without her ? Day's appointed sway
Usurped by desolate night. Her pillowed place
Without her ? Tears, ah me ! for love's good grace,
And cold forgetfulness of night or day.

What of the heart without her ? Nay, poor heart,
Of thee what word remains ere speech be still ?
A wayfarer by barren ways and chill,
Steep ways and weary, without her thou art,
Where the long cloud, the long wood's counterpart,
Sheds doubled darkness up the laboring hill.

LV

LOVE'S FATALITY

Sweet Love, — but oh ! most dread Desire of Love
Life-thwarted. Linked in gyves I saw them stand,
Love shackled with Vain-longing, hand to hand:
And one was eyed as the blue vault above:
But hope tempestuous like a fire-cloud hove
I' the other's gaze, even as in his whose wand
Vainly all night with spell-wrought power has spann'd
The unyielding caves of some deep treasure-trove.

Also his lips, two writhen flakes of flame,
Made moan: "Alas O Love, thus leashed with me !
Wing-footed thou, wing-shouldered, once born free:
And I, thy cowering self, in chains grown tame, —
Bound to thy body and soul, named with thy name, —
Life's iron heart, even Love's Fatality."

LVI

STILLBORN LOVE

The hour which might have been yet might not be,
Which man's and woman's heart conceived and bore
Yet whereof life was barren, — on what shore
Bides it the breaking of Time's weary sea ?
Bondchild of all consummate joys set free,
It somewhere sighs and serves, and mute before
The house of Love, hears through the echoing door
His hours elect in choral consonancy.

But lo ! what wedded souls now hand in hand
Together tread at last the immortal strand
With eyes where burning memory lights love home ?
Lo ! how the little outcast hour has turned
And leaped to them and in their faces yearned : —
"I am your child : O parents, ye have come !"

LVII

TRUE WOMAN — I. HERSELF

To be a sweetness more desired than Spring;
A bodily beauty more acceptable
Than the wild rose-tree's arch that crowns the fell;
To be an essence more environing
Than wine's drained juice; a music ravishing
More than the passionate pulse of Philomel; —
To be all this 'neath one soft bosom's swell
That is the flower of life : — how strange a thing !

How strange a thing to be what Man can know
But as a sacred secret ! Heaven's own screen
Hides her soul's purest depth and loveliest glow;
Closely withheld, as all things most unseen, —
The wave-bowered pearl, — the heart-shaped seal of green
That flecks the snowdrop underneath the snow.

LVIII

TRUE WOMAN — 2. HER LOVE

She loves him; for her infinite soul is Love,
And he her lodestar. Passion in her is
A glass facing his fire, where the bright bliss
Is mirrored, and the heat returned. Yet move
That glass, a stranger's amorous flame to prove,
And it shall turn, by instant contraries,
Ice to the moon; while her pure fire to his
For whom it burns, clings close i' the heart's alcove.

Lo ! they are one. With wifely breast to breast
And circling arms, she welcomes all command
Of love, — her soul to answering ardours fann'd:
Yet as morn springs or twilight sinks to rest,
Ah ! who shall say she deems not loveliest
The hour of sisterly sweet hand-in-hand ?

LIX

TRUE WOMAN — 3. HER HEAVEN

If to grow old in Heaven is to grow young,
(As the Seer saw and said,) then blest were he
With youth for evermore, whose heaven should be
True Woman, she whom these weak notes have sung.
Here and hereafter, — choir-strains of her tongue, —
Sky-spaces of her eyes, — sweet signs that flee
About her soul's immediate sanctuary, —
Were Paradise all uttermost worlds among.

The sunrise blooms and withers on the hill
Like any hillflower; and the noblest troth
Dies here to dust. Yet shall Heaven's promise clothe
Even yet those lovers who have cherished still
This test for love: — in every kiss sealed fast
To feel the first kiss and forbode the last.

LX

LOVE'S LAST GIFT

Love to his singer held a glistening leaf,
And said: "The rose-tree and the apple-tree
Have fruits to vaunt or flowers to lure the bee;
And golden shafts are in the feathered sheaf
Of the great harvest-marshal, the year's chief,
Victorious Summer; aye, and 'neath warm sea
Strange secret grasses lurk inviolably
Between the filtering channels of sunk reef.

All are my blooms; and all sweet blooms of love
To thee I gave while Spring and Summer sang;
But Autumn stops to listen, with some pang
From those worse things the wind is moaning of.
Only this laurel dreads no winter days:
Take my last gift; thy heart hath sung my praise."

PART II—CHANGE AND FATE

LXI

TRANSFIGURED LIFE

As growth of form or momentary glance
In a child's features will recall to mind
The father's with the mother's face combin'd, —
Sweet interchange that memories still enhance:
And yet, as childhood's years and youth's advance,
The gradual mouldings leave one stamp behind,
Till in the blended likeness now we find
A separate man's or woman's countenance: —

So in the Song, the singer's Joy and Pain,
Its very parents, evermore expand
To bid the passion's fullgrown birth remain,
By Art's transfiguring essence subtly spann'd;
And from that song-cloud shaped as a man's hand
There comes the sound as of abundant rain.

LXII

THE SONG-THROE

By thine own tears thy song must tears beget,
O Singer ! Magic mirror thou hast none
Except thy manifest heart; and save thine own
Anguish or ardour, else no amulet.
Cisterned in Pride, verse is the feathery jet
Of soulless air-flung fountains; nay, more dry
Than the Dead Sea for throats that thirst and sigh,
That song o'er which no singer's lids grew wet.

The Song-god — He the Sun-god — is no slave
Of thine: thy Hunter he, who for thy soul
Fledges his shaft: to no august control
Of thy skilled hand his quivered store he gave:
But if thy lips' loud cry leap to his smart,
The inspir'd recoil shall pierce thy brother's heart.

LXIII

THE SOUL'S SPHERE

Some prisoned moon in steep cloud-fastnesses, —
Throned queen and thrallèd; some dying sun whose pyre
Blazed with momentous memorable fire; —
Who hath not yearned and fed his heart with these ?
Who, sleepless, hath not anguished to appease
Tragical shadow's realm of sound and sight
Conjectured in the lamentable night ? . . .
Lo ! the soul's sphere of infinite images !

What sense shall count them ? Whether it forecast
The rose-winged hours that flutter in the van
Of Love's unquestioning unrevealed span, —
Visions of golden futures: or that last
Wild pageant of the accumulated past
That clangs and flashes for a drowning man.

LXIV

INCLUSIVENESS

The changing guests, each in a different mood,
Sit at the roadside table and arise:
And every life among them in likewise
Is a soul's board set daily with new food.
What man has bent o'er his son's sleep, to brood
How that face shall watch his when cold it lies? —
Or thought, as his own mother kissed his eyes,
Of what her kiss was when his father wooed?

May not this ancient room thou sit'st in dwell
In separate living souls for joy or pain?
Nay, all its corners may be painted plain
Where Heaven shows pictures of some life spent well;
And may be stamped, a memory all in vain,
Upon the sight of lidless eyes in Hell.

LXV

ARDOR AND MEMORY

The cuckoo-throb, the heartbeat of the Spring;
The rosebud's blush that leaves it as it grows
Into the full-eyed fair unblushing rose;
The summer clouds that visit every wing
With fires of sunrise and of sunseting;
The furtive flickering streams to light re-born
'Mid airs new-fledged and valorous lusts of morn,
While all the daughters of the daybreak sing: —

These ardor loves, and memory: and when flown
All joys, and through dark forest-boughs in flight
The wind swoops onward brandishing the light,
Even yet the rose-tree's verdure left alone
Will flush all ruddy though the rose be gone;
With ditties and with dirges infinite.

LXVI

KNOWN IN VAIN

As two whose love, first foolish, widening scope,
Knows suddenly, with music high and soft,
The Holy of holies; who because they scoff'd
Are now amazed with shame, nor dare to cope
With the whole truth aloud, lest heaven should ope;
Yet, at their meetings, laugh not as they laugh'd
In speech; nor speak, at length; but sitting oft
Together, within hopeless sight of hope
For hours are silent:— So it happeneth
When Work and Will awake too late, to gaze
After their life sailed by, and hold their breath.
Ah ! who shall dare to search through what sad maze
Thenceforth their incommunicable ways
Follow the desultory feet of Death ?

LXVII

THE HEART OF THE NIGHT

From child to youth; from youth to arduous man;
From lethargy to fever of the heart;
From faithful life to dream-dowered days apart;
From trust to doubt; from doubt to brink of ban; —
Thus much of change in one swift cycle ran
Till now. Alas, the soul ! — how soon must she
Accept her primal immortality, —
The flesh resume its dust whence it began ?

O Lord of work and peace ! O Lord of life !
O Lord, the awful Lord of will ! though late,
Even yet renew this soul with duteous breath:
That when the peace is garnered in from strife,
The work retrieved, the will regenerate,
This soul may see thy face, O Lord of death !

LXVIII

THE LANDMARK

Was *that* the landmark ? What, — the foolish well
Whose wave, low down, I did not stoop to drink,
But sat and flung the pebbles from its brink
In sport to send its imaged skies pell-mell,
(And mine own image, had I noted well !) —
Was that my point of turning ? — I had thought
The stations of my course should rise unsought,
As altar-stone or ensigned citadel.

But lo ! the path is missed, I must go back,
And thirst to drink when next I reach the spring
Which once I stained, which since may have grown black.
Yet though no light be left nor bird now sing
As here I turn, I'll thank God, hastening,
That the same goal is still on the same track.

LXIX

A DARK DAY

The gloom that breathes upon me with these airs
Is like the drops which strike the traveller's brow
Who knows not, darkling, if they bring him now
Fresh storm, or be old rain the covert bears.
Ah ! bodes this hour some harvest of new tares,
Or hath but memory of the day whose plough
Sowed hunger once, — the night at length when thou,
O prayer found vain, didst fall from out my prayers ?

How prickly were the growths which yet how smooth,
Along the hedgerows of this journey shed,
Lie by Time's grace till night and sleep may soothe !
Even as the thistledown from pathsides dead
Gleaned by a girl in autumns of her youth,
Which one new year makes soft her marriage-bed.

LXX

AUTUMN IDLENESS

This sunlight shames November where he grieves
In dead red leaves, and will not let him shun
The day, though bough with bough be over-run.
But with a blessing every glade receives
High salutation; while from hillock-eaves
The deer gaze calling, dappled white and dun,
As if, being foresters of old, the sun
Had marked them with the shade of forest-leaves.

Here dawn to-day unveiled her magic glass;
Here noon now gives the thirst and takes the dew;
Till eve bring rest when other good things pass.
And here the lost hours the lost hours renew
While I still lead my shadow o'er the grass,
Nor know, for longing, that which I should do.

LXXI

THE HILL SUMMIT

This feast-day of the sun, his altar there
In the broad west has blazed for vesper-song;
And I have loitered in the vale too long
And gaze now a belated worshipper.
Yet may I not forget that I was 'ware,
So journeying, of his face at intervals
Transfigured where the fringed horizon falls,—
A fiery bush with coruscating hair.

And now that I have climbed and won this height,
I must tread downward through the sloping shade
And travel the bewildered tracks till night.
Yet for this hour I still may here be stayed
And see the gold air and the silver fade
And the last bird fly into the last light.

LXXII

THE CHOICE — I

Eat thou and drink; to-morrow thou shalt die.
 Surely the earth, that's wise being very old,
 Needs not our help. Then loose me, love, and hold
 Thy sultry hair up from my face; that I
 May pour for thee this golden wine, brim-high,
 Till round the glass thy fingers glow like gold.
 We'll drown all hours: thy song, while hours are toll'd,
 Shall leap, as fountains veil the changing sky.

Now kiss, and think that there are really those,
 My own high-bosomed beauty, who increase
 Vain gold, vain lore, and yet might choose our way !
 Through many years they toil; then on a day
 They die not, — for their life was death, — but cease;
 And round their narrow lips the mould falls close.

LXXIII

THE CHOICE — 2

Watch thou and fear: to-morrow thou shalt die.
 Or art thou sure thou shalt have time for death ?
 Is not the day which God's word promiseth
 To come man knows not when ? In yonder sky,
 Now while we speak, the sun speeds forth: can I
 Or thou assure him of his goal ? God's breath
 Even at the moment haply quickeneth
 The air to a flame; till spirits, always nigh
 Though screened and hid, shall walk the daylight here.
 And dost thou prate of all that man shall do ?
 Canst thou, who hast but plagues, presume to be
 Glad in his gladness that comes after thee ?
 Will *his* strength slay *thy* worm in Hell ? Go to:
 Cover thy countenance, and watch, and fear.

LXXIV

THE CHOICE — 3

Think thou and act; to-morrow thou shalt die.
Outstretched in the sun's warmth upon the shore,
Thou say'st: 'Man's measured path is all gone o'er:
Up all his years, steeply, with strain and sigh,
Man clomb until he touched the truth; and I,
Even I, am he whom it was destined for.'
How should this be? Art thou then so much more
Than they who sowed, that thou shouldst reap thereby?

Nay, come up hither. From this wave-washed mound
Unto the furthest flood-brim look with me;
Then reach on with thy thought till it be drown'd.
Miles and miles distant though the grey line be.
And though thy soul sail leagues and leagues beyond,—
Still, leagues beyond those leagues, there is more sea.

LXXV

OLD AND NEW ART — I. ST. LUKE THE PAINTER

Give honor unto Luke Evangelist;
For he it was (the aged legends say)
Who first taught Art to fold her hands and pray.
Scarcely at once she dared to rend the mist
Of devious symbols: but soon having wist
How sky-breadth and field-silence and this day
Are symbols also in some deeper way,
She looked through these to God and was God's priest.

And if, past noon, her toil began to irk,
And she sought talismans, and turned in vain
To soulless self-reflections of man's skill,—
Yet now, in this the twilight, she might still
Kneel in the latter grass to pray again,
Ere the night cometh and she may not work.

LXXVI

OLD AND NEW ART — 2. NOT AS THESE

"I am not as these are," the poet saith
 In youth's pride, and the painter, among men
 At bay, where never pencil comes nor pen,
 And shut about with his own frozen breath.
 To others, for whom only rhyme wins faith
 As poets, — only paint as painters, — then
 He turns in the cold silence; and again
 Shrinking, "I am not as these are," he saith.

And say that this is so, what follows it ?
 For were thine eyes set backwards in thine head,
 Such words were well; but they see on, and far.
 Unto the lights of the great Past, new-lit
 Fair for the Future's track, look thou instead, —
 Say thou instead, "I am not as *these* are."

LXXVII

OLD AND NEW ART — 3. THE HUSBANDMAN

Though God, as one that is an householder,
 Called these to labor in His vineyard first,
 Before the husk of darkness was well burst
 Bidding them grope their way out and bestir,
 (Who, questioned of their wages, answered, "Sir,
 Unto each man a penny":) though the worst
 Burthen of heat was theirs and the dry thirst:
 Though God hath since found none such as these were
 To do their work like them: — Because of this
 Stand not ye idle in the market-place.
 Which of ye knoweth *he* is not that last
 Who may be first by faith and will ? — yea, his
 The hand which after the appointed days
 And hours shall give a Future to their Past ?

LXXVIII

SOUL'S BEAUTY

Under the arch of Life, where love and death,
Terror and mystery, guard her shrine, I saw
Beauty enthroned; and though her gaze struck awe,
I drew it in as simply as my breath.
Hers are the eyes which, over and beneath,
The sky and sea bend on thee, — which can draw,
By sea or sky or woman, to one law,
The allotted bondman of her palm and wreath.

This is that Lady Beauty, in whose praise
Thy voice and hand shake still, — long known to thee
By flying hair and fluttering hem, — the beat
Following her daily of thy heart and feet,
How passionately and irretrievably,
In what fond flight, how many ways and days !

LXXIX

BODY'S BEAUTY

Of Adam's first wife, Lilith, it is told
(The witch he loved before the gift of Eve,)
That, ere the snake's, her sweet tongue could deceive,
And her enchanted hair was the first gold.
And still she sits, young while the earth is old,
And, subtly of herself contemplative,
Draws men to watch the bright net she can weave,
Till heart and body and life are in its hold.

The rose and poppy are her flowers; for where
Is he not found, O Lilith, whom shed scent
And soft-shed kisses and soft sleep shall snare ?
Lo ! as that youth's eyes burned at thine, so went
Thy spell through him, and left his straight neck bent,
And round his heart one strangling golden hair.

LXXX

THE MONOCHORD

[Written during Music]

Is it the moved air or the moving sound
That is Life's self and draws my life from me,
And by instinct ineffable decree
Holds my breath quailing on the bitter bound ?
Nay, is it Life or Death, thus thunder-crown'd,
That 'mid the tide of all emergency
Now notes my separate wave, and to what sea
Its difficult eddies labour in the ground ?

Oh ! what is this that knows the road I came,
The flame turned cloud, the cloud returned to flame,
The lifted shifted steeps and all the way ? —
That draws round me at last this wind-warm space,
And in regenerate rapture turns my face
Upon the devious coverts of dismay ?

LXXXI

FROM DAWN TO NOON

As the child knows not if his mother's face
Be fair; nor of his elders yet can deem
What each most is; but as of hill or stream
At dawn, all glimmering life surrounds his place:
Who yet, tow'rd noon of his half-weary race,
Pausing awhile beneath the high sun-beam
And gazing steadily back, — as through a dream,
In things long past new features now can trace: —

Even so the thought that is at length fullgrown
Turns back to note the sun-smit paths, all gray
And marvellous once, where first it walked alone;
And haply doubts, amid the unblenching day,
Which most or least impelled its onward way, —
Those unknown things or these things overknown.

LXXXII

MEMORIAL THRESHOLDS

What place so strange, — though unrevealèd snow
With unimaginable fires arise
At the earth's end, — what passion of surprise
Like frost-bound fire-girt scenes of long ago ?
Lo ! this is none but I this hour; and lo !
This is the very place which to mine eyes
Those mortal hours in vain immortalize,
'Mid hurrying crowds, with what alone I know.

City, of thine a single simple door,
By some new Power reduplicate, must be
Even yet my life-porch in eternity,
Even with one presence filled, as once of yore:
Or mocking winds whirl round a chaff-strown floor
Thee and thy years and these my words and me.

LXXXIII

HOARDED JOY

I said: — "Nay, pluck not, — let the first fruit be:
Even as thou sayest, it is sweet and red,
But let it ripen still. The tree's bent head
Sees in the stream its own fecundity
And bides the day of fulness. Shall not we
At the sun's hour that day possess the shade,
And claim our fruit before its ripeness fade,
And eat it from the branch and praise the tree ?"

I say: "Alas ! our fruit hath wooed the sun
Too long, — 'tis fallen and floats adown the stream.
Lo, the last clusters ! Pluck them every one,
And let us sup with summer; ere the gleam
Of autumn set the year's pent sorrow free,
And the woods wail like echoes from the sea."

LXXXIV

BARREN SPRING

Once more the changed year's turning wheel returns:
And as a girl sails balanced in the wind,
And now before and now again behind
Stoops as it swoops, with cheek that laughs and burns,—
So Spring comes merry towards me here, but earns
No answering smile from me, whose life is twin'd
With the dead boughs that winter still must bind,
And whom to-day the Spring no more concerns.

Behold, this crocus is a withering flame;
This snowdrop, snow; this apple-blossom's part
To breed the fruit that breeds the serpent's art.
Nay, for these Spring-flowers, turn thy face from them,
Nor stay till on the year's last lily-stem
The white cup shrivels round the golden heart.

LXXXV

FAREWELL TO THE GLEN

Sweet stream-fed glen, why say "farewell" to thee
Who far'st so well and find'st for ever smooth
The brow of Time where man may read no ruth?
Nay, do thou rather say "farewell" to me,
Who now fare forth in bitterer fantasy
Than erst was mine where other shade might soothe
By other streams, what while in fragrant youth
The bliss of being sad made melancholy.

And yet, farewell! For better shalt thou fare
When children bathe sweet faces in thy flow
And happy lovers blend sweet shadows there
In hours to come, than when an hour ago
Thine echoes had but one man's sighs to bear
And thy trees whispered what he feared to know.

LXXXVI

VAIN VIRTUES

What is the sorriest thing that enters Hell ?
None of the sins, — but this and that fair deed
Which a soul's sin at length could supersede.
These yet are virgins, whom death's timely knell
Might once have sainted; whom the fiends compel
Together now, in snake-bound shuddering sheaves
Of anguish, while the pit's pollution leaves
Their refuse maidenhood abominable.

Night sucks them down, the tribute of the pit,
Whose names, half entered in the book of Life,
Were God's desire at noon. And as their hair
And eyes sink last, the Torturer deigns no whit
To gaze, but, yearning, waits his destined wife,
The Sin still blithe on earth that sent them there.

LXXXVII

LOST DAYS

The lost days of my life until to-day,
What were they, could I see them on the street
Lie as they fell ? Would they be ears of wheat
Sown once for food but trodden into clay ?
Or golden coins squandered and still to pay ?
Or drops of blood dabbling the guilty feet ?
Or such spilt water as in dreams must cheat
The throats of men in Hell, who thirst alway ?

I do not see them here; but after death
God knows I know the faces I shall see,
Each one a murdered self, with low last breath.
'I am thyself, — what hast thou done to me ?'
'And I — and I — thyself,' (lo ! each one saith,)
'And thou thyself to all eternity !'

LXXXVIII

DEATH'S SONGSTERS

When first that horse, within whose populous womb
 The birth was death, o'ershadowed Troy with fate,
 Her elders, dubious of its Grecian freight,
 Brought Helen there to sing the songs of home:
 She whispered, 'Friends, I am alone; come, come !'
 Then, crouched within, Ulysses waxed afraid,
 And on his comrades' quivering mouths he laid
 His hands, and held them till the voice was dumb.

The same was he who, lashed to his own mast,
 There where the sea-flowers screen the charnel-caves,
 Beside the sirens' singing island pass'd,
 Till sweetness failed along the inveterate waves. . .
 Say, soul, — are songs of Death no heaven to thee,
 Nor shames her lip the cheek of Victory ?

LXXXIX

HERO'S LAMP¹

That lamp thou fill'st in Eros' name to-night,
 O Hero, shall the Sestian augurs take
 To-morrow, and for drowned Leander's sake
 To Anteros its fireless lip shall plight.
 Aye, waft the unspoken vow: yet dawn's first light
 On ebbing storm and life twice ebb'd must break;
 While 'neath no sunrise, by the Avernian Lake,
 Lo where Love walks, Death's pallid neophyte.

That lamp within Anteros' shadowy shrine
 Shall stand unlit (for so the gods decree)
 Till some one man the happy issue see
 Of a life's love, and bid its flame to shine:
 Which still may rest unfir'd; for, theirs or thine,
 O brother, what brought love to them or thee ?

¹ After the deaths of Leander and of Hero, the signal-lamp was dedicated to Anteros, with the edict that no man should light it unless his love had proved fortunate.

XC

THE TREES OF THE GARDEN

Ye who have passed Death's haggard hills; and ye
Whom trees that knew your sires shall cease to know
And still stand silent: — is it all a show, —
A wisp that laughs upon the wall ? — decree
Of some inexorable supremacy
Which ever, as man strains his blind surmise
From depth to ominous depth, looks past his eyes,
Sphinx-faced with unabashed augury ?

Nay, rather question the Earth's self. Invoke
The storm-felled forest-trees moss-grown to-day
Whose roots are hillocks where the children play;
Or ask the silver sapling 'neath what yoke
Those stars, his spray-crown's clustering gems, shall wage
Their journey still when his boughs shrink with age.

XCI

“RETRO ME, SATHANA !”

Get thee behind me. Even as, heavy-curved,
Stooping against the wind, a charioteer
Is snatched from out his chariot by the hair,
So shall Time be; and as the void car, hurled
Abroad by reinless steeds, even so the world:
Yea, even as chariot-dust upon the air,
It shall be sought and not found anywhere.
Get thee behind me, Satan. Oft unfurled,
Thy perilous wings can beat and break like lath
Much mightiness of men to win thee praise.
Leave these weak feet to tread in narrow ways.
Thou still, upon the broad vine-sheltered path,
Mayst wait the turning of the phials of wrath
For certain years, for certain months and days.

XCII

LOST ON BOTH SIDES

As when two men have loved a woman well,
Each hating each, through Love's and Death's deceit;
Since not for either this stark marriage-sheet
And the long pauses of this wedding-bell;
Yet o'er her grave the night and day dispel
At last their feud forlorn, with cold and heat;
Nor other than dear friends to death may fleet
The two lives left that most of her can tell: —

So separate hopes, which in a soul had wooed
The one same Peace, strove with each other long,
And Peace before their faces perished since:
So through that soul, in restless brotherhood,
They roam together now, and wind among
Its bye-streets, knocking at the dusty inns.

XCIII

THE SUN'S SHAME — I

Beholding youth and hope in mockery caught
From life; and mocking pulses that remain
When the soul's death of bodily death is fain;
Honour unknown, and honour known unsought;
And penury's sedulous self-torturing thought
On gold, whose master therewith buys his bane;
And longed-for woman longing all in vain
For lonely man with love's desire distraught;
And wealth, and strength, and power, and pleasantness,
Given unto bodies of whose souls men say,
None poor and weak, slavish and foul, as they: —
Beholding these things, I behold no less
The blushing morn and blushing eve confess
The shame that loads the intolerable day.

XCIV

THE SUN'S SHAME — 2

As some true chief of men, bowed down with stress
Of life's disastrous eld, on blossoming youth
May gaze, and murmur with self-pity and ruth, —
"Might I thy fruitless treasure but possess,
Such blessing of mine all coming years should bless"; —
Then sends one sigh forth to the unknown goal,
And bitterly feels breathe against his soul
The hour swift-winged of nearer nothingness: —

Even so the World's gray Soul to the green World
Perchance one hour must cry: "Woe's me, for whom
Inveteracy of ill portends the doom, —
Whose heart's old fire in shadow of shame is furl'd:
While thou even as of yore art journeying,
All soulless now, yet merry with the Spring!"

XCV

MICHELANGELO'S KISS

Great Michelangelo, with age grown bleak
And uttermost labours, having once o'ersaid
All grievous memories on his long life shed,
This worst regret to one true heart could speak: —
That when, with sorrowing love and reverence meek,
He stooped o'er sweet Colonna's dying bed,
His Muse and dominant Lady, spirit-wed, —
Her hand he kissed, but not her brow or cheek.

O Buonarruoti, — good at Art's fire-wheels
To urge her chariot! — even thus the Soul,
Touching at length some sorely-chastened goal,
Earns oftenest but a little: her appeals
Were deep and mute, — lowly her claim. Let be:
What holds for her Death's garner? And for thee?

XCVI

THE VASE OF LIFE

Around the vase of Life at your slow pace
He has not crept, but turned it with his hands,
And all its sides already understands.
There, girt, one breathes alert for some great race;
Whose road runs far by sands and fruitful space;
Who laughs, yet through the jolly throng has pass'd;
Who weeps, nor stays for weeping; who at last,
A youth, stands somewhere crowned, with silent face.

And he has filled this vase with wine for blood,
With blood for tears, with spice for burning vow,
With watered flowers for buried love most fit;
And would have cast it shattered to the flood,
Yet in Fate's name has kept it whole; which now
Stands empty till his ashes fall in it.

XCVII

LIFE THE BELOVED

As thy friend's face, with shadow of soul o'erspread,
Somewhile unto thy sight perchance hath been
Ghastly and strange, yet never so is seen
In thought, but to all fortunate favor wed;
As thy love's death-bound features never dead
To memory's glass return, but contravene
Frail fugitive days, and alway keep, I ween,
Than all new life a livelier lovelihead: —

So Life herself, thy spirit's friend and love,
Even still as Spring's authentic harbinger
Glowes with fresh hours for hope to glorify;
Though pale she lay when in the winter grove
Her funeral flowers were snow-flakes shed on her
And the red wings of frost-fire rent the sky.

XCVIII

A SUPERScription

Look in my face; my name is Might-have-been;
I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell;
Unto thine ear I hold the dead-sea shell
Cast up thy Life's foam-fretted feet between;
Unto thine eyes the glass where that is seen
Which had Life's form and Love's, but by my spell
Is now a shaken shadow intolerable,
Of ultimate things unuttered the frail screen.

Mark me, how still I am ! But should there dart
One moment through thy soul the soft surprise
Of that winged Peace which lulls the breath of sighs, —
Then shalt thou see me smile, and turn apart
Thy visage to mine ambush at thy heart
Sleepless with cold commemorative eyes.

XCIX

HE AND I

Whence came his feet into my field, and why ?
How is it that he sees it all so drear ?
How do I see his seeing, and how hear
The name his bitter silence knows it by ?
This was the little fold of separate sky
Whose pasturing clouds in the soul's atmosphere
Drew living light from one continual year:
How should he find it lifeless ? He, or I ?

Lo ! this new Self now wanders round my field,
With plaints for every flower, and for each tree
A moan, the sighing wind's auxiliary:
And o'er sweet waters of my life, that yield
Unto his lips no draughts but tears unseal'd,
Even in my place he weeps. Even I, not he.

C

NEWBORN DEATH — I

To-day Death seems to me an infant child
Which her worn mother Life upon my knee
Has set to grow my friend and play with me;
If haply so my heart might be beguil'd
To find no terrors in a face so mild, —
If haply so my weary heart might be
Unto the newborn milky eyes of thee,
O Death, before resentment reconcil'd.

How long, O Death ? And shall thy feet depart
Still a young child's with mine, or wilt thou stand
Fullgrown the helpful daughter of my heart,
What time with thee indeed I reach the strand
Of the pale wave which knows thee what thou art,
And drink it in the hollow of thy hand ?

CI

NEWBORN DEATH — 2

And thou, O Life, the lady of all bliss,
With whom, when our first heart beat full and fast,
I wandered till the haunts of men were pass'd,
And in fair places found all bowers amiss
Till only woods and waves might hear our kiss,
While to the winds all thought of Death we cast : —
Ah, Life ! and must I have from thee at last
No smile to greet me and no babe but this ?

Lo ! Love, the child once ours; and Song, whose hair
Blew like a flame and blossomed like a wreath;
And Art, whose eyes were worlds by God found fair;
These o'er the book of Nature mixed their breath
With neck-twined arms, as oft we watched them there:
And did these die that thou mightst bear me Death ?

CII

THE ONE HOPE

When vain desire at last and vain regret
Go hand in hand to death, and all is vain,
What shall assuage the unforgotten pain
And teach the unforgetful to forget ?
Shall Peace be still a sunk stream long unmet, —
Or may the soul at once in a green plain
Stoop through the spray of some sweet life-fountain
And cull the dew-drenched flowering amulet ?

Ah ! when the wan soul in that golden air
Between the scripted petals softly blown
Peers breathless for the gift of grace unknown, —
Ah ! let none other alien spell soe'er
But only the one Hope's one name be there, —
Not less nor more, but even that word alone.

of womanly life, and a blow from which she did not fully recover for years." She was about thirty when she met Charles Bagot Cayley, whom she loved "deeply and permanently," but she found defects in his creed and was therefore compelled to reject his suit.

Almost as precocious as her brother Dante Gabriel, she was only seventeen when her grandfather Polidori had her first volume of poetry privately printed, and three years later she contributed some exquisite lyrics to *The Germ*. In 1862 the delightful *Goblin Market* at once established her reputation and prepared the way for the acceptance of "the new poetry" of Swinburne, Morris, and D. G. Rossetti. Several other volumes followed, all religious in general tone and marked by such masterpieces as "Amor Mundi," "A Birthday," "An 'Immurata' Sister," and "Passing Away," which Swinburne (with others) ranked among the finest things ever written.

She also wrote a number of beautiful individual sonnets, including those familiar ones, "Remember" and "Rest," and two sequences, *Later Life*, (twenty-eight in number) and *Monna Innominata*, here printed. Although the brief prefatory note to *Monna Innominata* indicates that it is merely a literary exercise, the autobiographical import is too obvious to be overlooked. This sequence at once calls up the *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, a comparison which is not fair to Miss Rossetti as *Monna Innominata* is not on her highest level, although it does show clearly enough what Paul Elmere More considers her more "feminine" spirit. There is some truth in the suggestion that *Sonnets from the Portuguese* might have been written by a man, whereas *Monna Innominata* could have been written only by a woman.

MONNA INNOMINATA

A SONNET OF SONNETS

Beatrice, immortalized by 'altissimo poeta . . . cotanta amante'; Laura, celebrated by a great though an inferior bard,—have alike paid the exceptional penalty of exceptional honour, and have come down to us resplendent with charms, but (at least, to my apprehension) scant of attractiveness.

These heroines of world-wide fame were preceded by a bevy of unnamed ladies, 'donne innominate,' sung by a school of less conspicuous poets; and in that land and that period which gave simultaneous birth to Catholics, to Albigenses, and to Troubadours, one can imagine many a lady as sharing her lover's poetic aptitude, while the barrier between them might be one held sacred by both, yet not such as to render mutual love incompatible with mutual honour.

Had such a lady spoken for herself, the portrait left us might have appeared more tender, if less dignified, than any drawn even by a devoted friend. Or had the Great Poetess of our own day and nation only been unhappy instead of happy, her circumstances would have invited her to bequeath to us, in lieu of the 'Portugese Sonnets,' an inimitable 'donna innominata' drawn not from fancy but from feeling, and worthy to occupy a niche beside Beatrice and Laura.

— C. G. R.

I

Lo di che han detto a' dolci amici addio. — DANTE

Amor, con quanto sforzo oggi mi vinci! — PETRARCA

Come back to me, who wait and watch for you:—
Or come not yet, for it is over then,
And long it is before you come again,
So far between my pleasures are and few.
While, when you come not, what I do I do
Thinking 'Now when he comes,' my sweetest 'when':
For one man is my world of all the men
This wide world holds; O love, my world is you.
Howbeit, to meet you grows almost a pang
Because the pang of parting comes so soon;
My hope hangs waning, waxing, like a moon
Between the heavenly days on which we meet:
Ah me, but where are now the songs I sang
When life was sweet because you called them sweet?

II

Era già l'ora che volge il desio. — DANTE

Ricorro al tempo ch' io vi vidi prima. — PETRARCA

I wish I could remember that first day,
First hour, first moment of your meeting me,
If bright or dim the season, it might be
Summer or Winter for aught I can say;
So unrecorded did it slip away,
So blind was I to see and to foresee,
So dull to mark the budding of my tree
That would not blossom yet for many a May.
If only I could recollect it, such
A day of days! I let it come and go
As traceless as a thaw of bygone snow;
It seemed to mean so little, meant so much;
If only now I could recall that touch,
First touch of hand in hand—Did one but know!

III

O ombre vane, fuor che ne l'aspetto ! — DANTE
Immaginata guida la conduce. — PETRARCA

I dream of you, to wake: would that I might
 Dream of you and not wake but slumber on;
 Nor find with dreams the dear companion gone,
 As, Summer ended, Summer birds take flight.
 In happy dreams I hold you full in sight,
 I blush again who waking look so wan;
 Brighter than sunniest day that ever shone,
 In happy dreams your smile makes day of night.
 Thus only in a dream we are at one,
 Thus only in a dream we give and take
 The faith that maketh rich who take or give;
 If thus to sleep is sweeter than to wake,
 To die were surely sweeter than to live,
 Though there be nothing new beneath the sun.

IV

Poca favilla gran fiamma seconda. — DANTE
Ogni altra cosa, ogni pensier va fore,
È sol ivi con voi rimansi amore. — PETRARCA

I loved you first: but afterwards your love,
 Outsoaring mine, sang such a loftier song
 As drowned the friendly cooings of my dove.
 Which owes the other most? My love was long,
 And yours one moment seemed to wax more strong;
 I loved and guessed at you, you construed me
 And loved me for what might or might not be —
 Nay, weights and measures do us both a wrong.
 For verily love knows not 'mine' or 'thine';
 With separate 'I' and 'thou' free love has done,
 For one is both and both are one in love:
 Rich love knows nought of 'thine that is not mine';
 Both have the strength and both the length thereof,
 Both of us, of the love which makes us one.

V

*Amor che a nullo amato amar perdona. — DANTE**Amor m'addusse in sì gioiosa spene. — PETRARCA*

O my heart's heart, and you who are to me
 More than myself myself, God be with you,
 Keep you in strong obedience leal and true
 To Him whose noble service setteth free;
 Give you all good we see or can foresee,
 Make your joys many and your sorrows few,
 Bless you in what you bear and what you do,
 Yea, perfect you as He would have you be.
 So much for you; but what for me, dear friend?
 To love you without stint and all I can,
 To-day, to-morrow, world without an end;
 To love you much and yet to love you more,
 As Jordan at his flood sweeps either shore;
 Since woman is the helpmeet made for man.

VI

*Or puoi la quantitate**Comprender de l'amor che a te mi scalda. — DANTE**Non vo' che da tal nodo amor mi scioglia. — PETRARCA*

Trust me, I have not earned your dear rebuke, —
 I love, as you would have me, God the most;
 Would lose not Him, but you, must one be lost,
 Nor with Lot's wife cast back a faithless look,
 Unready to forego what I forsook;
 This say I, having counted up the cost,
 This, though I be the feeblest of God's host,
 The sorriest sheep Christ shepherds with His crook.
 Yet while I love my God the most, I deem
 That I can never love you overmuch;
 I love Him more, so let me love you too;
 Yea, as I apprehend it, love is such
 I cannot love you if I love not Him,
 I cannot love Him if I love not you.

VII

Qui primavera sempre ed ogni frutto. — DANTE*Ragionando con meco ed io con lui.* — PETRARCA

'Love me, for I love you' — and answer me,
 'Love me, for I love you': so shall we stand
 As happy equals in the flowering land
 Of love, that knows not a dividing sea.
 Love builds the house on rock and not on sand,
 Love laughs what while the winds rave desperately;
 And who hath found love's citadel unmanned?
 And who hath held in bonds love's liberty? —
 My heart's a coward though my words are brave —
 We meet so seldom, yet we surely part
 So often; there's a problem for your art!
 Still I find comfort in his Book who saith,
 Though jealousy be cruel as the grave,
 And death be strong, yet love is strong as death.

VIII

Come dicesse a Dio, d'altro non calme. — DANTE*Spero trovar pietà non che perdono.* — PETRARCA

'I, if I perish, perish' — Esther spake:
 And bride of life or death she made her fair
 In all the lustre of her perfumed hair
 And smiles that kindle longing but to slake.
 She put on pomp of loveliness, to take
 Her husband through his eyes at unaware;
 She spread abroad her beauty for a snare,
 Harmless as doves and subtle as a snake.
 She trapped him with one mesh of silken hair,
 She vanquished him by wisdom of her wit,
 And built her people's house that it should stand: —
 If I might take my life so in my hand,
 And for my love to Love put up my prayer,
 And for love's sake by Love be granted it!

IX

O dignitosa coscienza e netta! — DANTE*Spirto più acceso di virtuti ardenti.* — PETRARCA

Thinking of you, and all that was, and all
 That might have been and now can never be,
 I feel your honoured excellence, and see
 Myself unworthy of the happier call:
 For woe is me who walk, so apt to fall,
 So apt to shrink afraid, so apt to flee,
 Apt to lie down and die (ah woe is me !)
 Faithless and hopeless turning to the wall.
 And yet not hopeless quite nor faithless quite,
 Because not loveless; love may toil all night,
 But take at morning; wrestle till the break
 Of day, but then wield power with God and man: —
 So take I heart of grace as best I can,
 Ready to spend and be spent for your sake.

X

Con miglior corso e con migliore stella. — DANTE*La vita fugge e non s'arresta un' ora.* — PETRARCA

Time flies, hope flags, life plies a wearied wing;
 Death following hard on life gains ground apace;
 Faith runs with each and rears an eager face,
 Outruns the rest, makes light of everything,
 Spurns earth, and still finds breath to pray and sing;
 While love ahead of all uplifts his praise,
 Still asks for grace and still gives thanks for grace,
 Content with all day brings and night will bring.
 Life wanes; and when love folds his wings above
 Tried hope, and less we feel his conscious pulse,
 Let us go fall asleep, dear friend, in peace:
 A little while, and age and sorrow cease;
 A little while, and life reborn annuls
 Loss and decay and death, and all is love.

XI

Vien dietro a me e lascia dir le genti. — DANTE
Contando i casi della vita nostra. — PETRARCA

Many in aftertimes will say of you
 'He loved her' — while of me what will they say?
 Not that I loved you more than just in play,
 For fashion's sake as idle women do.
 Even let them prate; who know not what we knew
 Of love and parting in exceeding pain,
 Of parting hopeless here to meet again,
 Hopeless on earth, and heaven is out of view.
 But by my heart of love laid bare to you,
 My love that you can make not void nor vain,
 Love that foregoes you but to claim anew
 Beyond this passage of the gate of death,
 I charge you at the Judgment make it plain
 My love of you was life and not a breath.

XII

Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona. — DANTE
Amor vien nel bel viso di costei. — PETRARCA

If there be any one can take my place
 And make you happy whom I grieve to grieve,
 Think not that I can grudge it, but believe
 I do commend you to that nobler grace,
 That readier wit than mine, that sweeter face;
 Yea, since your riches make me rich, conceive
 I too am crowned, while bridal crowns I weave,
 And thread the bridal dance with jocund pace.
 For if I did not love you, it might be
 That I should grudge you some one dear delight;
 But since the heart is yours that was mine own,
 Your pleasure is my pleasure, right my right,
 Your honourable freedom makes me free,
 And you companioned I am not alone.

XIII

È drizzeremo gli occhi al Primo Amore. — DANTE
Ma trovo peso non da le mie braccia. — PETRARCA

If I could trust mine own self with your fate,
 Shall I not rather trust it in God's hand ?
 Without Whose Will one lily doth not stand,
 Nor sparrow fall at his appointed date;
 Who numbereth the innumerable sand,
 Who weighs the wind and water with a weight,
 To Whom the world is neither small nor great,
 Whose knowledge foreknew every plan we planned.
 Searching my heart for all that touches you,
 I find there only love and love's goodwill
 Helpless to help and impotent to do,
 Of understanding dull, of sight most dim;
 And therefore I commend you back to Him
 Whose love your love's capacity can fill.

XIV

È la Sua Volontade è nostra pace. — DANTE
Sol con questi pensier, con altre chiome. — PETRARCA

Youth gone, and beauty gone if ever there
 Dwelt beauty in so poor a face as this;
 Youth gone and beauty, what remains of bliss ?
 I will not bind fresh roses in my hair,
 To shame a cheek at best but little fair, —
 Leave youth his roses, who can bear a thorn, —
 I will not seek for blossoms anywhere,
 Except such common flowers as blow with corn.
 Youth gone and beauty gone, what doth remain ?
 The longing of a heart pent up forlorn,
 A silent heart whose silence loves and longs;
 The silence of a heart which sang its songs
 While youth and beauty made a summer morn,
 Silence of love that cannot sing again.

XIII — WILFRID SCAWEN BLUNT

[1840-1922]

ONE OF the most vigorous, versatile, and fortunate figures of the past hundred years, Blunt is chiefly remembered for a few sonnets often quoted in anthologies and for the vigorous anti-imperialism of his "secret histories," especially *My Diaries*. His interests were too diverse for a systematic literary career and he was too much of a free lance to be a leader in organized politics. He was an English attaché at many foreign courts, a country gentleman, a daring traveller, a breeder of Arabian horses, a translator from the Arabic, an amateur architect, painter and sculptor, a man of fashion, a friend of statesmen, a patron of genius, a helper of revolutions, and a distinguished author.

The son of a wealthy landed proprietor of Sussex, Blunt grew up a Catholic, spent a colorful decade in the diplomatic service, married Annabella Noel, the granddaughter of Byron, and at twenty-nine, on the death of his brother, succeeded to the ancestral estates. In 1875, after publishing anonymously his first book, *Songs and Sonnets of Proteus*, Blunt and his wife began a long series of adventurous horseback journeys through Spain, Algeria, Mesopotamia, Persia, and Central Arabia which led to his ardent sympathy with Mohammedan aspirations. He also lived for extended periods in Egypt where he was the friend of leading nationalists and a bitter opponent of British power. As an advocate of Home Rule he was arrested in Ireland in 1887 while conducting a political meeting and imprisoned for two months. Most of his last thirty years were spent in comparative peace at New-buildings Place, where he was a gracious and brilliant host, "the uncrowned king of Sussex." He had lost his

faith completely in his youth, and thereafter had tried again and again to return to Catholicism, or even to accept Mohammedanism, but always in vain, and he died in doubt, unshriven by the Church.

Blunt wrote all sorts of poetry, including notable experiments on oriental models, a passable philosophical drama in blank verse, *Satan Absolved*, a society novel in rhyme, and a powerful ballad on the English occupation of Egypt, "The Wind and the Whirlwind." But his best achievements were in the sonnet form, which he employed some three hundred times, mostly in the elaboration of five sequences, *The Love Sonnets of Proteus*, *Natalia's Resurrection*, *In Vinculis*, *A New Pilgrimage*, and *Esther*. In 1898 W. E. Henley held the opinion that *Proteus* was "the truest and sincerest revelation done in these times of the emotions peculiar to men's youth" and would ultimately be ranked with Sidney and Shakespeare. The *Proteus* series contains a dozen or more fine individual sonnets such as those beginning "O World, in very truth thou art too young," "Why do we fret at the inconstancy," "Oh! leave the past to bury its own dead" and "To stand upon a windy pinnacle." Although not structurally perfect, they have perhaps, as William Sharp said, "more of the Shakespearian ring" than any sonnets of our age.

Esther does not reach the same lyrical heights as the *Proteus*, and it is much less alluded to, but altogether it is a much more unique, naïve and fundamental disclosure of adolescent feelings. Not published until 1892, when Blunt was fifty-three, *Esther* was probably written much earlier or transcribed directly from youthful journals.

ESTHER

A YOUNG MAN'S TRAGEDY

I

When is life other than a tragedy,
Whether it is played in tears from the first scene,
In sable robes and grief's mute pageantry,
For loves that died ere they had ever been,
Or whether on the edge of joys set keen,
While all the stage with laughter is agog,
Death stepping forward with an altered mien
Pulls off his mask, and speaks the epilogue ?
Life is a play acted by dying men,
Where, if its heroes seem to foot it well
And go light-tongued without grimace of pain,
Death will be found anon. And who shall tell
Which part was saddest, or in youth or age,
When the tired actor stops and leaves the stage ?

II

Yes, who shall tell the value of our tears,
Whether we wept aright or idly grieved ?
There is a tragedy in unloved years,
And in those passionate hours by love deceived,
In lips unvisited and hopes too soon bereaved,
And youth's high courage which no strength could save,
And manhood's web of fate by folly weaved,
And grey-haired grief brought down into the grave.
Who shall distinguish truly and be wise
'Twixt grief and grief, 'twixt night and night ? The sun
Has its own sorrow and a voice that cries
Louder than darkness of its joys undone,
And pleads with that exceeding bitter cry,
"I have tasted honey, and behold, I die !"

III

A little honey ! Ay, a little sweet,
A little pleasure when the years were young,
A joyous measure trod by dancing feet,
A tale of folly told by a loved tongue.
These are the things by which our hearts are wrung
More than by tears. Oh, I would rather laugh,
So I had not to choose such tales among
Which was most laughable. Man's nobler half
Resents mere sorrow. I would rather sit
With just the common crowd that watch the play
And mock at harlequin and the clown's wit,
And call it tragedy and go my way.
I should not err, because the tragic part
Lay not in these, but sealed in my own heart.

IV

And thus it is. The tale I have to tell
Is such another. He who reads shall find
That which he brings to it of Heaven or Hell
For his best recompense where much is blind,
A jest-book or a sermon or mere wind, —
Each as he may, — for life's least godly mirth
Is mingled strangely here with fate unkind,
And this is a true story of the Earth.
The passionate heart of youth with its desires
Is not all noble, and some baseness clings
For ever mixed with its eternal fires,
Else were it single among human things.
And all life's wisdom learns but this last plan,
To jest at tears and weep Man's mirth and Man.

V

I had been an hour at Lyons. My breath comes
Fast when I think of it. An hour, no more,
I trod those streets and listened to the drums,
The mirth, the music, and the city's roar,
And found no sermon for me in her stones.
It was the evening of St. Martin's fair,
And all the world, its working bees and drones,
Had gone out to the quays in the sweet air,
To taste that thing more sweet to human breath,
Its own mad laughter at its own mad kind.
"An hour of prayer," I mused, "for men of faith."
Yet all these worshippers were only blind.
And I, no whit less blind, among them went
In search of pleasure for my punishment.

VI

The Lyons fair ! In truth it was a Heaven
For idlers' eyes, a feast of curious things,
Swings, roundabouts, and shows, the Champions Seven,
Dramas of battles and the deaths of kings,
The whole Place d'Armes grown white as if with snow,
With canvas booths arrayed in triple lines,
And jugglers, lions, snakes from Mexico,
Dancers on tight ropes, clowns and columbines.
I went among them all with grave intent,
I, too, to find it may be some delight.
I was a boy and knew not what life meant,
Nor what the pleasures were men seek in it.
Only I knew that mingling with that throng,
I was a stranger a strange world among.

VII

I had made my round, as yet with little gain
Of undiscovered good in that gay place.
I had sought my share of pleasure, but in vain.
Laughter was not for me, and hid her face.
I had asked for mirth. The oracles were dumb.
No sound of Folly with her tinkling feet
Had bid my own feet follow, and no home
Was mine for merriment or musings sweet.
I had ceased to hope and almost ceased to seek,
When, from the farthest booth of all, the bray
Of brass and drums and fiddling and the shriek
Of a dwarf's voice invited me to stay.
The crowd, as scenting some more mirthful thing,
Surged round that booth agape and wondering.

VIII

It was a booth no larger than the rest,
No loftier fashioned and no more sublime,
As poor a shrine as ever youth possessed
In which to worship truth revealed in time.
Yet to my soul the mean remembrance clings
With all the folly of that far fair eve,
And my pulse throbs with lost imaginings,
And passion rises from its grave to grieve.
Vain dreams, brute images ! and over all
The shrill-voiced dwarf its hierarch and priest,
Vaunting its praise, a pagan prince of Baal.
It scared me as of some wild idol feast.
"The Booth of Beauty," thus it was I read,
Blazoned in scarlet letters overhead.

IX

I stopped, I listened, and I entered in,
With half-a-dozen more, that sight to see.
"The Booth of Beauty," 'twas a name of sin
Which seemed to promise a new mystery.
There was a crowd already in the place,
And 'twixt me and the stage, now darkly hid,
The gathering evening had come down apace,
And all was dim within and overspread.
I know not by what instinct or mute proof
Of Providence it was, but this is true,
Even as I stepped 'neath that ignoble roof,
A prescience warned me there of portents new,
And a voice spoke with no uncertain sound
Warning me back as from ungodly ground.

X

An instant, just an instant, and no more,
And it was gone, and I with eyes unsealed
Saw the bald pageant stripped to its thought's core,
And naked there to my scared eyes revealed.
Upon a throne which filled the upper space
Two female monsters sat, the first a girl
Marked like a leopard with pied arms and face,
And restless eyes aflame and teeth of pearl.
Her as we ventured near, I heard awhile
Say she was hungry, and a gleam like blood
Lighted her lips and died in a fierce smile.
A woman's hand behind me in the crowd
Clutched at my arm, and through the booth there went
A shiver of half fear, half merriment.

XI

Beyond her sat a second monster. She
In shape and sense was undisguisedly real,
An ox-eyed queen of full-fed majesty
And giant height and comeliness ideal.
She too her tale related, as was due,
In measured tones, her age, her birth, her name,
Bourgeois her parents, friends of order too,
And good Imperialists of honest fame,
Her age eighteen, her height seven feet, her waist
An ell and more in its circumference,
Her leg above the knee, and where was placed
Its point of full development . . . The sense
Of the rest I lost, for laughing half aloud
Again a woman touched me in the crowd.

XII

She was a little woman dressed in black,
Who stood on tiptoe with a childish air,
Her face and figure hidden in a *sacque*,
All but her eyes and forehead and dark hair.
Her brow was pale, but it was lit with light,
And mirth flashed out of it, it seemed in rays.
A childish face, but wise with woman's wit,
And something, too, pathetic in its gaze.
In the bare dusk of that unseemly place
I noted all, and this besides, a scar
Which on her cheek had left a paler trace.
It seemed to tell its tale of love and war.
That little scar ! Doubt whispered of this one,
Boy as I was, she had not lived a nun.

XIII

A second warning, nor unheeded. Yet
The thought appealed to me as no strange thing,
Pure though I was, that love impure had set
Its seal on that fair woman in her Spring.
Her broken beauty did not mar her grace
In form or spirit. Nay, it rather moved.
It seemed a natural thing for that gay face
It should have known and suffered and been loved.
It kindled in me, too, to view it thus,
A mood of daring which was more than mine,
And made my shamefaced heart leap valorous,
And fired its courage to a zeal divine.
All this, in one short instant, as I gazed
Into her eyes, admiring, yet amazed.

XIV

Me, too, she doubtless read. For, with her hand
Raised as for help and pointing to a chair,
She bade me, with a gesture, part command
And part entreaty, I would set her there.
She could not see, she said, the Queen of Love
My eyes so coveted, and laughed and laid
Upon my lips the fingers of her glove
When I protested at the words she said.
I hardly know how it all came about
But did her bidding as she would, and she
From her new vantage bore the humour out
And mocked the more at each new mockery.
And still she held my arm and I her dress,
"Lest she should fall," she said, in waywardness.

XV

Thus it began with laughter. But anon
The ox-eyed queen, who had resumed by rote
The tale of her perfections one by one,
Turned by some ominous chance towards the spot
Where we two stood. "And take good note," said she,
"All here is honest beauty, flesh and blood,
As any in the world. Yet, if there be
A doubt between you, let me make it good.
Which of you two will honour me so near
As to prove the truth?" My cheeks in spite of me
Flamed in the dark, and I was seized with fear
And a wild doubt lest mine the choice should be.
The little woman on the chair began
To shout aloud and bid me play the man.

XVI

Oh, 'tis a terrible thing in early youth
To be assailed by laughter and mute shame,
A terrible thing to be befooled forsooth
By one's own foolish face betrayed in flame.
The little traitor, when she saw me dumb,
Went on to clap her hands, till all and each
Took up the jest and called on me to come
And prove my courage in the manly breach.
The imperious queen stood waiting for me there,
Pointing and beckoning, and the crowd closed in.
Under the cover of a wilder air
From the brass band, the darkness and the din,
I know not how it was, in fear or fun,
I touched that monster's knee, and all was done.

XVII

I touched that knee. She did not show surprise,
And the earth had not opened at our feet.
She did not even laugh. Her foolish eyes
Twinkled a moment in her cheeks, then set
Like fog-bound stars for ever from my sight.
And at a signal from the little woman,
Who clung to me still, a chorus left and right
Of laughter rose Homeric and inhuman,
Drowning all further sense in one wild roar.
I heard the spotted girl with leopard lips
Complain that she was hungry as before,
And all the world was merged in an eclipse,
Darkening the air around and overhead,
And then I broke away and turned and fled.

XVIII

Alas, poor Queen of Beauty ! In my heart
I could weep for you and your sad graceless doom.
You stand at my life's threshold in the part
Of king's chief jester in the ante-room,
And none more near the throne. You made us sport
According to your folly, and passed on,
And now you live with pension in Love's Court,
And privilege to jest and wear the crown.
Yes, I could weep for you. Your part it was
To strike the cymbals on a night sublime
For Love's first bridal dance. Alas, alas !
Time, the avenger of our manhood's prime,
Is gathering all life courtiers to his cell,
And you among the rest. So fare you well.

XIX

I fled the booth with feelings as of Cain,
Yet laughing at my own bewilderment.
My cheeks had blushed till it was physical pain,
And my eyes smarted. Through my head there went
The little woman's last appealing word
Bidding me stop, in tones that smote afresh.
And 'twixt my finger and thumb there throbbed and stirred
The semblance of that monstrous pound of flesh,
The knee that I had handled. With it too
The jet beads of the little woman's skirt,
Where I had held her, left an impress new
And touched my conscience to a deeper hurt.
I was ashamed of all with shame intense,
My youth, my frailty, and my innocence.

XX

I fled into the bosom of the night,
Leaving the Fair behind me. I had need
Of the sweet healing darkness to my sight,
As a bruise needs a poultice. And in speed
I went thus half through Lyons, loath to win
Back to the crowd, and doubly loath to go
Thus foolishly transfigured to my inn.
Strange fateful night ! Even to this hour 'tis so.
Night in a city with the distant hum
Of laughing crowds, the silence of strange streets,
My own mute footfalls and the redolent gloom
Of oil-lit thresholds brings it back and cheats
My sorrow still to the last dreams of good
I dreamed that evening in my solitude.

XXI

If I have since done evil in my life,
I was not born for evil. This I know.
My soul was a thing pure from sensual strife.
No vice of the blood foredoomed me to this woe.
I did not love corruption. Beauty, truth,
Justice, compassion, peace with God and man,
These were my laws, the instincts of my youth,
And hold me still, conceal it as I can.
I did not love corruption, nor do love.
I find it ill to hate and ill to grieve.
Nature designed me for a life above
The mere discordant dreams in which I live.
If I now go a beggar on the Earth,
I was a saint of Heaven by right of birth.

XXII

You know the story of my birth, the name
Which I inherited for good and ill,
The secret of my father's fame and shame,
His tragedy and death on that dark hill.
You know at least what the world knows or knew,
For time has taken half the lookers-on,
As it took him, and leaves his followers few,
And those that loved him scarce or almost none.
To me, his son, there had remained the story,
Told and retold by her who knew it best,
A mystery of love, perhaps of glory,
A heritage to hold and a bequest.
Ah, how it loved him, that sad woman's heart,
What faith was hers and what a martyr's part !

XXIII

Nor later, when with her my childhood died,
Was life less sealed to me. The Church became
My guardian next and mother deified,
Who lit within me a more subtle flame
Of constancy, and clothed me in her mood.
No sound, no voice within that sanctuary
Told me of common evil. Unsubdued
And vast and strange, a thing from which to flee,
The world lay there without us. We within,
Fenced in and folded safe in our strong home,
Knew nothing of the sorrow and the sin.
'Tis no small matter to have lived in Rome,
In the Church's very bosom and abode,
Cloistered and cradled there, a child of God.

XXIV

Thus through these griefs I had been set apart,
As for a double priesthood. Life to me,
In those first moments when I probed my heart,
Less an enchantress seemed than enemy.
My knowledge of the world had nothing human.
I saw Mankind a tribe, my natural foe,
Whom I must one day battle with; and Woman,
Ah! Woman was a snare I did not know.
Indeed, it may be that already hope
Knocked at my soul with tales it dared not own
Of woman's kindness in my horoscope.
Man, only Man I feared with eyes bent down,
Man the oppressor, who with pale lips curled
Sheds blood in the high places of the world.

XXV

My childhood, then, had passed a mystery
Shrouded by death, my boyhood a shut thing.
The passion of my soul as it grew free
With growing youth, a bird with broken wing,
Knew nothing of its strength to dare or do,
Or, if it dreamed of battle still to come,
That was its secret hidden in the blue
Of life's great vault of tears which was its doom,
A duty of revenge some day for blood.
Enough ! You know I held me from the press
To whom base things are nothing, that I stood
Parted from this world's weekday wickedness
By a whole legend of romance sublime,
Perhaps by the dead virtue of a crime.

XXVI

I linger on the threshold of my youth.
If you could see me now as then I was,
A fair-faced frightened boy with eyes of truth
Scared at the world yet angry at its laws,
Plotting all plots, a blushing Cataline
Betrayed by his own cheeks, a misanthrope
In love with all things human and divine,
The very fool of fortune and high hope,
You would deny you knew me. Oh, the days
Of our absurd first manhood, rich in force,
Rich in desire of happiness and praise
Yet impotent in its heroic course,
And all for lack of that one worthless thing,
Knowledge of life and love and suffering !

XXVII

At such a time indeed of youth's first morn,
There is a heaving of the soul in pain,
A mighty labour as of joys unborn,
Which grieves it and disquiets it in vain.
The soul is scared at her own lack of peace,
Her cradle song is mute, and she has fled
From her old life as to a wilderness.
She finds herself awake and without bread.
'Tis then the body, her new counsellor,
Speaks in her ear, and still with eloquence
Pleads for more action, and his voice to her
Is sweet with love, and sadly she consents.
There is a day of youth which needs must come
When each must learn his life and leave his home.

XXVIII

The summer I had passed in my own fashion
High in the Alps, a proselyte to toil.
I was released and free, and spent my passion
On the bare rocks as on a fruitful soil.
I had soothed my soul with labour, and its fire
Borne to those naked heights where I unfurled
My flag with new ambitions, high and higher
Even to the last bleak outposts of the world.
My soul had needed courage, and behold !
Here in these battles with the hosts of air
And rock and snow and storm she had grown bold
And proved her temper for the coming war.
This was her gain, the strife she must engage
With physical fear, her childhood's heritage.

XXIX

A glorious triumph. On that day of days
When, standing on the summit's utmost edge
Of my first mountain-top, I viewed the maze
Which I had travelled upwards, ledge on ledge,
And all that wilderness of rock and plain
Rolled at my feet, and, when with heel fast set
On Nature's neck, I knew the giant slain,
My thrall, my prisoner, on the parapet,
I was transfigured. Slowly in me rose
The throb of courage as a sense new born.
"Even Man," I cried, "Man's self, my foe of foes,
The phantom of my fears, shall feel my scorn
Yet in a nobler war." And trembling then
I seemed to stand, I too, a man with men.

XXX

Thus was my soul enfranchised. But anon,
With courage fired to full-fledged enterprise,
And pushing still the vantage I had won,
I sought communion with a world less wise,
The living world. I mixed with not a few,
Shepherds and countrymen, and village priests,
Bagmen at inns, and all the motley crew
Which comes and goes on market days and feasts
In old-world hostelries of old-world towns.
These gave a second schooling, till the grace
Of the summer ended on the upper downs,
And, carrying still its glory on my face,
I came to Lyons where these things befell.
The why and wherefore of it who shall tell ?

XXXI

The booths were shut. The Fair was at an end,
And the crowd gone with multitudinous feet
Noisily home, or lingering still to spend
At Café doors or at the turn of the street
In twos and threes its laughter with good-night.
All turned to silence. Even my heart had peace
As, self-possessed and freed from its vain fright,
I found myself once more upon the quays.
I stopped before the theatre grown dark,
With its extinguished lamps and blank repose
A scene of melancholy sad to mark,
Made sadder too by the white moon which rose
Behind it virginal with vaporous wings,
Aloof and careless of all earthly things.

XXXII

I had stopped to read a handbill of the play,
Caught by the lettering. Thus it was I read,
"Programme of this night's pieces, Saturday
The twentieth of October, 'X.Y.Z.,'
A piece in one act, and 'Les Bergers Fous,'
These to be followed by the well-known 'drame'
Of, 'Manon Lescaut,' here brought out anew
For the first time at Lyons." And a name
Followed in giant type of one who then
Illustrious stood in all the world of folly,
The most sublime Comedian known to men,
"Mademoiselle Esther, Muse of Melancholy."
She in her part of Manon, so 'twas writ,
Three nights would play in honour infinite.

XXXIII

Such was the legend. I had read it through
Twice ere I thought of thinking what it meant.
And as I turned with a sigh because I knew
That I alone perhaps of all who went
Homewards that night should bid good-night to none,
From a side door thrust open on the street
And calling as she passed in petulant tone
To one within who seemed to rouse her heat,
"Ah, mauvais plaisant !" ere she slammed it to,
Out stepped my little woman of the Fair.
Her face was altered, but its form and hue,
If I had doubted in the moonlight there,
Was marked for me by that unaltered sign,
The little scar, its beauty's underline.

XXXIV

She saw me in an instant, and stopped short
With a sudden change of look from fierce to gay.
Her black eyes gleamed with triumph as they caught,
Like some wild bird of chase, their natural prey.
"Ha, ha," she cried, "*c'est lui, c'est l'ingénu*.
Ah, vagabond ! 'Tis thus you find me out.
Standing *en faction*, and at midnight too,
At the actors' door, with no more fear or doubt
Than any sinner of them all. Oh wise !
Who would have guessed it ? No. You shall not speak.
You shall not soil your innocent lips with lies
For any foolish reason in the week,
Nor for the year together if you told
Your stories here till both of us grew old.

XXXV

“Silence. I will not listen !” “And for what ?”
She added strangely, in a softer mood.
“You see I am not angry. Do you not ?
Only soft-hearted, and alas ! too good.
Why did you follow me ?” She took my hand
With a sudden action so devoid of guile
That I, who could not choose but understand,
Was softened too and fooled into a smile.
“Why did you follow me ? Here, feel,” she said,
“How my heart beats. It frightens me to find
So much of cunning in so young a head,
So young a heart, — and mine which is not blind !”
She pressed my hand to her side. In truth, her heart
Was beating there, my own heart’s counterpart.

XXXVI

She watched me curiously with mocking eyes,
Yet tenderly, till once again her mirth
Prevailed with her, and quick in feigned surprise
Thrusting me back, “Ah, traitor !” she broke forth,
“’Twas not for me then you were waiting there,
Not me, poor foolish me. The Queen of Love,
The woman of the booth ! She was your care !
Monster ! to dare me thus ! And yet you prove
Your wit in vain, for, look, you foolish boy,
She cannot walk the streets like you and me,
Or the town would be at her heels.” Convulsed with joy
At this new jest she laughed remorselessly,
Till I was almost angry and inclined
To leave her there. And then she changed her mind.

XXXVII

She seemed to change as if with a change of the wind,
And growing serious sighed, "Now look," she said,
"You think me a mad woman and unkind,
But that is nonsense. I am sound of head
And not unsound of heart, ah, no, not there !
But you turn my head with your John the Baptist's face.
I will not be made jealous, so beware."
She looked entreatingly as if for grace,
And held me by the arm. "We are strangers both
Among these heavy Lyonnese. By right
We so should hold together. Tell me truth.
You never saw me, did you, till to-night ?"
I said, "I came here not twelve hours ago !
Why should you think it ?" "No," she broke in, "no."

XXXVIII

"I do not doubt it. You have a look of truth
Which is beyond suspicion. But the world
Is as full of knaves as fools. You have your youth
And I my wisdom. Then your head is curled
Just as I like it, and your face is smooth,
And it can blush like your red innocent hands.
I saw it in an instant in the booth
That we should know each other and be friends.
It does not do to question. Look at me.
I am not pretty, yet the world's best sense
Has raved about my beauty foolishly
These five years past in every mood and tense !
Say. Would you like we should be friends for good ?"
Not knowing what I said, I said I would.

XXXIX

"We shall be friends. How friends? You must know me first.

What? Like the Pont Neuf? Should you wish it?
Well,

None ever yet repented it who durst.

Oh! you shall know me as I dare not tell.

You said I was not pretty. 'Tis the paint

That ruins the complexion and the hours

Spent at the footlights. These would rob a saint,

Much more a sinner, of her natural powers.

Voilà la casse du métier! Then, this scar,

Some praise it as a beauty. They are fools.

At best it but an honour is of war,

And beauty is not measured by foot-rules.

So you forgive it me, what need we care?

Fair faces are but signs of things more fair."

XL

She went on talking like a running stream,

Without more reason or more pause or stay

Than to gather breath and then pursue her whim

Just where it led her, tender, sad, or gay.

Her moods seemed all alike to her. But soon

With a little shudder, for the wind was chill

And we had lingered on there in the moon,

She bade me follow, and I bowed my will.

The torrent of her words had drowned in me

What humour of resistance there had been,

And the last sense of danger ceased to be

In the first joy of yielding to such sin.

There is no pleasure in the world so sweet

As, being wise, to fall at folly's feet.

XLI

Who might describe the humours of that night,
The mirth, the tragedy, the grave surprise,
The treasures of fair folly infinite
Learned as a lesson from those childlike eyes?
When we had left our river of fair hope,
The world once more engulfed us in its ways,
And street on street we passed, and shop on shop,
Still loitering by to peer within and praise.
At each new stall we stopped as if in doubt,
Asking a price, and in pretence to buy.
I thought she would have worn men's patience out
With her fool's talk while I stood idly by.
And still, as each grew warm, with cunning word
She turned their wrath from surly to absurd.

XLII

And so we went our way, — yes, hand in hand,
Like two lost children in some magic wood
Baffled and baffling with enchanter's wand
The various beasts that crossed us and withstood.
Each step was an experience. Every mood
Of that fair woman a fresh gospelling,
Which spoke aloud to me and stirred my blood
To a new faith, I knew not with what sting.
One thing alone I knew or cared to know,
Her strange companionship thus strangely won.
The past, the future, all of weal or woe
In my old life was gone, for ever gone.
And still to this I clung as one who clings
To hope's last hencoop in the wreck of things.

XLIII

How shall I tell my fall ? The life of man
Is but a tale of tumbles, this way thrown
At his beginning by mere haste of plan
In the first gaping ditch with flowers o'ergrown;
Anon more cautious for his wounded knees,
Yet falling still through much expectancy;
And so to age, the goal of his heart's ease,
Stumbling in blindness on he knows not why.
How shall I tell it ? As the poets tell
Who wrap love in a garment of vain light ?
Or plainly naked, the poor child of Hell
And laughter that it is and starless night ?
I like the truth best. Yet this love, sad thing,
Mired and defiled, I saw it once a king.

XLIV

We came at last, alas ! I see it yet,
With its open windows on the upper floor,
To a certain house still stirring, with lights set,
And just a chink left open of the door.
Here my companion stopped and bade me in;
Her dressmaker's, she said. And I, who heard
A sound of women's voices from within,
Shrank back alarmed and ready at a word
From any damsel stoutly to deny.
But "Madame Blanche," she said to ease my fears,
"Is a good soul, and far too wise to pry
Or fancy evil of her customers
At any hour of the night they choose to come,
Much less of me." And so I followed dumb.

XLV

I followed dumb and shrinking like a thief
Close in her shadow from the women's guess,
Yet ruthlessly betrayed for my cheeks' grief
From head to foot in the tall pier-glasses.
My vagabond attire, my coat all rags,
My tattered plaid stained with the summer's dust,
The sash which bound my waist all gaps and jags,
With gaiters frayed and such sad shoes as must
Have served Ulysses at his journey's close;
All these I saw revealed to my disgrace,
My hat still crowned with its last Alpine rose,
And what she had called my "John the Baptist's face"
Red with confusion and the rage of youth,
I saw it all, the whole remorseless truth.

XLVI

Not so my little sponsor. She, with eyes
Proudly unconscious of my fool's display,
Talked volubly to all and scorned disguise,
While Madame Blanche herself, no less than they,
Smiled us a welcome, and with upraised hands
Disclaimed excuse and led us straightway through
To an inner room as to a Conference.
There I first saw to my amazement new
That fair white mystery, a woman's dress,
And heard its language spoken. Stuffs were brought
And cards unrolled before us, braids and lace
Lauded and handled and their merits taught
To ears that listened and to eyes that saw
Their secret sense, the law within the law.

XLVII

Sublime discussions ! Let who will be wise !
These are the things that touch us and transcend.
The logic of all beauty is surprise,
The reason of all love the unseen end,
Still as they argued on of this and that,
Turning perchance to me as arbiter
Where in my corner I still speechless sat
To end their strife, my vision seemed to clear,
The scales fell from my eyes of ignorance,
The terror from my heart. One thing alone
Stood plain before me, the supreme fair chance
Of a first fortune, glorious and unknown,
Which beckoned me with no uncertain hand
To touch and taste and learn and understand.

XLVIII

Suddenly then my strange companion cried,
"Bring me the body." In a moment more
She had thrown off her hat, her veil untied,
And motioning all the women to the door,
While I sat speechless by who would have gone,
Undid her jacket and anon her dress,
With the jet buttons of it one by one,
And stood but clothed the more in loveliness,
A sight sublime, a dream, a miracle,
A little goddess from some luminous field
Brought down unconscious on our Earth to dwell,
And in an age of innocence revealed,
Naked but not ashamed. Nay, wherefore shame ?
And I, ah, who shall blame me, who shall blame ?

XLIX

I will not tell the secrets of that place.
When Madame Blanche returned to us again
I was kneeling there, while Esther kissed my face
And dried and comforted my tears. O vain
And happy tears ! O griefs thrice comforted !
I trembled, but not with fear. If I was dumb,
'Twas not for lack of speech where all was said.
My doubts were ended and my fears o'ercome,
And joy had triumphed. Life has given me much
And pleasure much, and Heaven may yet have store
Of nobler hopes to kindle and to touch,
But never for all time, ah, never more,
That delicate dawn of wonder when lips move
First to the love of life and love of love.

L

He who has once been happy is for aye
Out of destruction's reach. His fortune then
Holds nothing secret, and Eternity,
Which is a mystery to other men,
Has like a woman given him its joy.
Time is his conquest. Life, if it should fret,
Has paid him tribute. He can bear to die.
He who has once been happy ! When I set
The world before me and survey its range,
Its mean ambitions, its scant fantasies,
The shreds of pleasure which for lack of change
Men wrap around them and call happiness,
The poor delights which are the tale and sum
Of the world's courage in its martyrdom;

LI

When I hear laughter from a tavern door,
When I see crowds agape and in the rain
Watching on tiptoe and with stifled roar
To see a rocket fired or a bull slain,
When misers handle gold, when orators
Touch strong men's hearts with glory till they weep,
When cities deck their streets for barren wars
Which have laid waste their youth, and when I keep
Calmly the count of my own life and see
On what poor stuff my manhood's dreams were fed
Till I too learned what dole of vanity
Will serve a human soul for daily bread,
— Then I remember that I once was young
And lived with Esther the world's gods among.

LII

I lived with Esther, not for many days,
If days be counted by the fall of night
And the sun's rising, yet through years of praise,
If truth be timepiece of joys infinite.
And what a life it was ! No vain sweet dream
Of love in idleness which all men know,
But a full drama fashioned on the theme
Of strength victorious over death and woe.
Here was no faltering. Ours the triumph was
Of that strong logic which beholds each day
As a new world to conquer, and the cause
Itself complete of a more glorious fray.
To-day our cycle was. In it sublime
We sat enthroned as on the neck of Time.

LIII

For Esther was a woman most complete
In all her ways of loving. And with me
Dealt as one deals who careless of deceit
And rich in all things is of all things free.
She did not stop with me to feel her way
Into my heart, because she all hearts knew,
But, like some prodigal heir of yesterday
Just in possession, counted not her due
And grandly gave. O brave humility !
O joy that kneels ! O pride that stoops to tears !
She spent where others had demanded fee,
Served where all service had of right been hers,
Casting her bread of life upon love's ways,
Content to find it after many days.

LIV

I must not speak of it. Even yet my heart
Is but a feeble thing to fret and cry,
And it might chance to wake and with a start,
When nights were still and stars were in the sky,
Sit up and muse upon its lonely state,
With the same stars to mock at it as then,
And certain chords that touched might touch it yet,
And griefs find issue and tears come again.
I must not venture farther in this mood.
Grief is forsworn to me. I will not grieve,
Nor think too much on Esther's womanhood,
Rather on that which was its make-believe.
And yet awhile she loved me. In this thought
I long found rest when all was come to nought.

LV

We stayed at Lyons three days, only three,
In Esther's world of wonder and renown,
She, glorious star, each night immortally
Playing her Manons to the listening town.
I glorious too, but in Love's firmament,
Watching her face by which alone I moved,
A shadow near her raptured and intent,
And seeking still the signs that I was loved.
Thrice happy days ! Thrice blessed tragedy !
Her Des Grieux was I, her lover lorn
Bound to her fortunes, blest to live or die,
And faithful ever though to faith forsworn,
Waiting behind the scenes in that stage-land
To greet her exits and to squeeze her hand.

LVI

Who has not wept with Manon ? Of all tales
That thrill youth's fancy or to tears or mirth
None other is there where such grief prevails,
Such passionate pity for the loves of Earth.
Who has not wept with Manon in her sin,
Wept in her punishment ? What angry heart
Has been unmoved in youth to see her win
With those sad archers to the inhuman cart ?
Who has not followed her beyond the seas,
And sold his life for her, and bowed his pride,
And sinned all sins to buy her back to ease,
And died all deaths to venge her when she died ?
And I, blest boy, who each new happy night
When all was done still lived in her delight !

LVII

This was my term of glory. All who know
Something of life will guess untold the end.
In love, one ever kisses for his woe,
One lends his cheek, alas ! or seems to lend,
One has the pleasure, one the penalties,
One is in earnest, one has time to laugh,
One turns impatient from imploring eyes,
And one in terror spells love's epitaph.
There was no wisdom in this love of mine,
Therefore it perished earlier than the rest,
Although I poured out all my heart like wine
And watered it with tears, and prayed unblest
In my soul's rage to all the Saints of heaven
To give me this and yet to be forgiven.

LVIII

It might not be. Some things are possible,
And some impossible for even God.
And Esther had no soul which Heaven or Hell
Could touch by joy or soften by the rod.
She could not really love me. The day came,
How soon, how late, I need not to devise,
When passion prayed its last, and only shame
Stood for my portion in a world grown wise,
And I went forth for ever from her sight
Knowing the good and evil. On that day
I did her wrong by anger. Now life's light
Illumines all, and I behold her gay
As I first knew her in my love purblind,
Dear passionate Esther, soulless but how kind !

XIV — GEORGE SANTAYANA

[1863-]

WHEN a new edition of Santayana's sonnets and shorter poems was published a few years ago, Philip Littel, the critic, wrote: "For me, as for many other men who were young and at Harvard in the later eighteen-eighties, it is impossible to regard these selected poems as a reprint. It is almost impossible to regard them as a book. They are the first moves, watched by us long ago from the sidelines, in a beautifully played game. They remind us of days when the earliest among them were appearing in the *Harvard Monthly*, leaving us now doubtful whether a talent could grow which had an air of being so full-grown in youth, and now wondering for what conquests of the upper regions these wings were being disciplined. Rather enigmatic he seemed to us, who were his juniors by a few years, and who could not understand his blending of sincerity and reserve. We were puzzled and we were fascinated, as if by something feline, by something colubrine, at the core of his loneliness. We did not know — how could we? — what this solitary thinker was about."

Yet in that first series of sonnets, written between his twentieth and thirtieth years, Santayana disclosed as much of himself as he ever has since; he confessed the color of his mind, sketched his spiritual apprenticeship, and set more or less definitely the themes for all his work to come. The subject of his poems is, as he has said, simply his philosophy in the making. "Of impassioned tenderness or Dionysiac frenzy" they have nothing, but they represent "a true inspiration, a true docility."

If Santayana was born contemplative and unsurprised, he had loneliness thrust upon him when he was moved from his native Spain to the alien air of Boston at the age

of nine. He was educated at Harvard where he taught philosophy from 1889 to 1912, but he was never thoroughly at home in Cambridge and his noted colleagues such as James, Royce, Palmer, and Münsterberg were never quite comfortable with him. James used to speak of Santayana's "white marble mind" and once described him as "the shiningest fish in the sea," and for all his admiration he could only consider Santayana's curious blend of materialism, Platonism and Catholic sentiment "a perfection of rottenness in a philosophy." Certainly it is not American in emphasis and it does not make for optimism or "progress."

Santayana waited until after he was thirty to publish his first volume, the small collection of *Sonnets and Poems*. This was followed two years later by a notable work in æsthetics, *The Sense of Beauty*, and then by *Lucifer: A Theological Tragedy*, composed in noble blank verse. *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, a brilliant group of essays, appeared in 1900, another collection of poems in 1901, and finally in 1905, his first magnum opus, *The Life of Reason* in five volumes of magnificent prose. He attracted a more general audience with such books as *Three Philosophical Poets*, *Character and Opinion in the United States* and *Soliloquies in England*, and is now in the midst of his second magnum opus, a series of volumes on *The Realms of Beings*, in which the Hindu and Spinozistic rather than the Greek elements prevail. Yet here also is the Santayana of the early poems, only now a little more mellow, more sonorous and more profound.

"Henceforth nature and spirit can play together like mother and child, each marvellously pleasant to the other, yet deeply unintelligible; for as she created him she knew not how, merely by smiling in her dreams, so in awaking and smiling back he somehow understands her; at least he is all the understanding she has of herself."

SONNETS

[1883-1893]

I

I sought on earth a garden of delight,
Or island altar to the Sea and Air,
Where gentle music were accounted prayer,
And reason, veiled, performed the happy rite.
My sad youth worshipped at the piteous height
Where God vouchsafed the death of man to share;
His love made mortal sorrow light to bear,
But his deep wounds put joy to shamèd flight.
And though his arms, outstretched upon the tree,
Were beautiful, and pleaded my embrace,
My sins were loth to look upon his face.
So came I down from Golgotha to thee,
Eternal Mother; let the sun and sea
Heal me, and keep me in thy dwelling-place.

II

Slow and reluctant was the long descent,
With many farewell pious looks behind,
And dumb misgivings where the path might wind,
And questionings of nature, as I went.
The greener branches that above me bent,
The broadening valleys, quieted my mind,
To the fair reasons of the Spring inclined
And to the Summer's tender argument.
But sometimes, as revolving night descended,
And in my childish heart the new song ended,
I lay down, full of longing, on the steep;
And, haunting still the lonely way I wended,
Into my dreams the ancient sorrow blended,
And with these holy echoes charmed my sleep.

III

O world, thou choosest not the better part !
It is not wisdom to be only wise,
And on the inward vision close the eyes,
But it is wisdom to believe the heart.
Columbus found a world, and had no chart,
Save one that faith deciphered in the skies;
To trust the soul's invincible surmise
Was all his science and his only art.
Our knowledge is a torch of smoky pine
That lights the pathway but one step ahead
Across a void of mystery and dread.
Bid, then, the tender light of faith to shine
By which alone the mortal heart is led
Unto the thinking of the thought divine.

IV

I would I had been born in nature's day,
When man was in the world a wide-eyed boy,
And clouds of sorrow crossed his sky of joy
To scatter dewdrops on the buds of May.
Then could he work and love and fight and pray,
Nor heartsick grow in fortune's long employ.
Mighty to build and ruthless to destroy
He lived, while maskèd death unquestioned lay.
Now ponder we the ruins of the years,
And groan beneath the weight of boasted gain;
No unsung bacchanal can charm our ears
And lead our dances to the woodland fane,
No hope of heaven sweeten our few tears
And hush the importunity of pain.

V

Dreamt I to-day the dream of yesternight,
Sleep ever feigning one evolving theme,—
Of my two lives which should I call the dream ?
Which action vanity ? which vision sight ?
Some greater waking must pronounce aright,
If aught abideth of the things that seem,
And with both currents swell the flooded stream
Into an ocean infinite of light.
Even such a dream I dream, and know full well
My waking passeth like a midnight spell,
But know not if my dreaming breaketh through
Into the deeps of heaven and of hell.
I know but this of all I would I knew:
Truth is a dream, unless my dream is true.

VI

Love not as do the flesh-imprisoned men
Whose dreams are of a bitter bought caress,
Or even of a maiden's tenderness
Whom they love only that she loves again.
For it is but thyself thou lovest then,
Or what thy thoughts would glory to possess;
But love thou nothing thou wouldst love the less
If henceforth ever hidden from thy ken.
Love but the formless and eternal Whole
From whose effulgence one unheeded ray
Breaks on this prism of dissolving clay
Into the flickering colours of thy soul.
These flash and vanish; bid them not to stay,
For wisdom brightens as they fade away.

VII

I would I might forget that I am I,
And break the heavy chain that binds me fast,
Whose links about myself my deeds have cast.
What in the body's tomb doth buried lie
Is boundless; 'tis the spirit of the sky,
Lord of the future, guardian of the past,
And soon must forth, to know his own at last.
In his large life to live, I fain would die.
Happy the dumb beast, hungering for food,
But calling not his suffering his own;
Blessèd the angel, gazing on all good,
But knowing not he sits upon a throne;
Wretched the mortal, pondering his mood,
And doomed to know his aching heart alone.

VIII

O Martyred Spirit of this helpless Whole,
Who dost by pain for tyranny atone,
And in the star, the atom, and the stone,
Purgest the primal guilt, and in the soul;
Rich but in grief, thou dost thy wealth unroll,
And givest of thy substance to thine own,
Mingling the love, the laughter, and the groan
In the large hollow of the heaven's bowl.
Fill full my cup; the dregs and honeyed brim
I take from thy just hand, more worthy love
For sweetening not the draught for me or him.
What in myself I am, that let me prove;
Relent not for my feeble prayer, nor dim
The burning of thine altar for my hymn.

IX

Have patience; it is fit that in this wise
The spirit purge away its proper dross.
No endless fever doth thy watches toss,
For by excess of evil, evil dies.
Soon shall the faint world melt before thine eyes,
And, all life's losses cancelled by life's loss,
Thou shalt lay down all burdens on thy cross,
And be that day with God in Paradise.
Have patience; for a long eternity
No summons woke thee from thy happy sleep;
For love of God one vigil thou canst keep
And add thy drop of sorrow to the sea.
Having known grief, all will be well with thee,
Ay, and thy second slumber will be deep.

X

Have I the heart to wander on the earth,
So patient in her everlasting course,
Seeking no prize, but bowing to the force
That gives direction and hath given birth?
Rain tears, sweet Pity, to refresh my dearth,
And plough my sterile bosom, sharp Remorse,
That I grow sick and curse my being's source
If haply one day passes lacking mirth.
Doth the sun therefore burn, that I may bask ?
Or do the tirèd earth and tireless sea,
That toil not for their pleasure, toil for me ?
Amid the world's long striving, wherefore ask
What reasons were, or what rewards shall be ?
The covenant God gave us is a task.

1883-1893

XI

Deem not, because you see me in the press
Of this world's children run my fated race,
That I blaspheme against a proffered grace,
Or leave unlearned the love of holiness.
I honour not that sanctity the less
Whose aureole illumines not my face,
But dare not tread the secret, holy place
To which the priest and prophet have access.
For some are born to be beatified
By anguish, and by grievous penance done;
And some, to furnish forth the age's pride,
And to be praised of men beneath the sun;
And some are born to stand perplexed aside
From so much sorrow — of whom I am one.

XII

Mightier storms than this are brewed on earth
That pricks the crystal lake with summer showers.
The past hath treasure of sublimer hours,
And God is witness to their changeless worth.
Big is the future with portentous birth
Of battles numberless, and nature's powers
Outdo my dreams of beauty in the flowers,
And top my revels with the demons' mirth.
But thou, glad river that hast reached the plain,
Scarce wak'st the rushes to a slumberous sigh.
The mountains sleep behind thee, and the main
Awaits thee, lulling an eternal pain
With patience; nor doth Phœbe, throned on high,
The mirror of thy placid heart disdain.

XIII

Sweet are the days we wander with no hope
Along life's labyrinthine trodden way,
With no impatience at the steep's delay,
Nor sorrow at the swift-descended slope.
Why this inane curiosity to grope
In the dim dust for gems' unmeaning ray ?
Why this proud piety, that dares to pray
For a world wider than the heaven's cope ?
Farewell, my burden ! No more will I bear
The foolish load of my fond faith's despair,
But trip the idle race with careless feet.
The crown of olive let another wear;
It is my crown to mock the runner's heat
With gentle wonder and with laughter sweet.

XIV

There may be chaos still around the world,
This little world that in my thinking lies;
For mine own bosom is the paradise
Where all my life's fair visions are unfurled.
Within my nature's shell I slumber curled,
Unmindful of the changing outer skies,
Where now, perchance, some new-born Eros flies,
Or some old Cronos from his throne is hurled.
I heed them not; or if the subtle night
Haunt me with deities I never saw,
I soon mine eyelid's drowsy curtain draw
To hide their myriad faces from my sight.
They threat in vain; the whirlwind cannot awe
A happy snow-flake dancing in the flaw.

XV

A wall, a wall to hem the azure sphere,
And hedge me in from the disconsolate hills !
Give me but one of all the mountain rills,
Enough of ocean in its voice I hear.
Come no profane insatiate mortal near
With the contagion of his passionate ills;
The smoke of battle all the valleys fills,
Let the eternal sunlight greet me here.
This spot is sacred to the deeper soul
And to the piety that mocks no more.
In nature's inmost heart is no uproar,
None in this shrine; in peace the heavens roll,
In peace the slow tides pulse from shore to shore,
And ancient quiet broods from pole to pole.

XVI

A thousand beauties that have never been
Haunt me with hope and tempt me to pursue;
The gods, methinks, dwell just behind the blue;
The satyrs at my coming fled the green.
The flitting shadows of the grove between
The dryads' eyes were winking, and I knew
The wings of sacred Eros as he flew
And left me to the love of things not seen.
'Tis a sad love, like an eternal prayer,
And knows no keen delight, no faint surcease.
Yet from the seasons hath the earth increase,
And heaven shines as if the gods were there.
Had Dian passed there could no deeper peace
Embalm the purple stretches of the air.

XVII

There was a time when in the teeth of fate
I flung the challenge of the spirit's right;
The child, the dreamer of that visioned night,
Woke, and was humbled unto man's estate.
A slave I am; on sun and moon I wait,
Who heed not that I live upon their light.
Me they despise, but are themselves so bright
They flood my heart with love, and quench my hate.
O subtle Beauty, sweet persuasive worth
That didst the love of being first inspire,
We do thee homage both in death and birth.
Thirsting for thee, we die in thy great dearth,
Or borrow breath of infinite desire
To chase thine image through the haunted earth.

XVIII

Blaspheme not love, ye lovers, nor dispraise
The wise divinity that makes you blind,
Sealing the eyes, but showing to the mind
The high perfection from which nature strays.
For love is God, and in unfathomed ways
Brings forth the beauty for which fancy pined.
I loved, and lost my love among mankind;
But I have found it after many days.
Oh, trust in God, and banish rash despair,
That, feigning evil, is itself the curse!
My angel is come back, more sad and fair,
And witness to the truth of love I bear,
With too much rapture for this sacred verse,
At the exceeding answer to my prayer.

XIX

Above the battlements of heaven rise
The glittering domes of the gods' golden dwelling,
Whence, like a constellation, passion-quelling,
The truth of all things feeds immortal eyes.
There all forgotten dreams of paradise
From the deep caves of memory upwelling,
All tender joys beyond our dim foretelling
Are ever bright beneath the flooded skies.
There we live o'er, amid angelic powers,
Our lives without remorse, as if not ours,
And others' lives with love, as if our own;
For we behold, from those eternal towers,
The deathless beauty of all wingèd hours,
And have our being in their truth alone.

XX

These strewn thoughts, by the mountain pathway sprung,
I conned for comfort, till I ceased to grieve,
And with these flowering thorns I dare to weave
The crown, great Mother, on thine altar hung.
Teach thou a larger speech to my loosed tongue,
And to mine opened eyes thy secrets give,
That in thy perfect love I learn to live,
And in thine immortality be young.
The soul is not on earth an alien thing
That hath her life's rich sources elsewhere;
She is a parcel of the sacred air.
She takes her being from the breath of Spring,
The glance of Phœbus is her fount of light,
And her long sleep a draught of primal night.

XV — EUGENE LEE-HAMILTON

[1845-1907]

EUGENE LEE-HAMILTON, the half-brother of Violet Paget (Vernon Lee), was born in London and educated in France, Germany, and Oriel College, Oxford, where he won a leading scholarship. He entered the British diplomatic service as attaché at Paris in 1869, was secretary of the Alabama Claims Commission at Geneva, and when his health began to decline as a result of over-study, he was transferred to Lisbon in 1873. But a complete nervous breakdown followed almost immediately and for twenty years he lay paralysed on a wheeled bed in Florence.

*Hybrid of rack and of Procrustes' bed,
Thou thing of wood, of leather, and of steel,
Round which, by day and night, at head and heel,
Crouch shadowy Tormentors, dumb and dread;*

*Round which the wingless Hours, with feet of lead
Forever crawl, in spite of fierce appeal,
And the dark Terrors dance their silent reel;
What will they do with thee when I am dead?*

*Lest men should ask, who find thee stowed away
In some old lumber room, what wretch was he
Who used so strange an engine night and day;*

*Fain would I have thee shivered utterly;
For, please the Fates, no other son of clay
Will ever need so dire a bed.*

So weak, so much in pain at first that he could only hear or write a line or two of poetry at a time, he produced no

less than seven volumes during those two black decades. The first, *Poems and Transcripts* (1878), was of little promise but the second, *God, Saints and Men* (1880), indicated an approaching mastery of both ballad and narrative verse, suggesting in manner Rossetti as well as Browning. The two succeeding volumes fulfilled this promise and also exhibited an unsuspected genius, in thirty notable sonnets, including such familiar ones as "Idle Charon," "Sea-Shell Murmurs," and "Sunken Gold." *Imaginary Sonnets* presents a hundred historical and legendary characters, each one distilling his soul magically in fourteen brief lines. *The Fountain of Youth* (1891) is a "fantastic tragedy" of a Ponce de Leon on a futile and grotesque quest; it has been considered Lee-Hamilton's "most individual contribution to English literature."

In 1894 he put together the long record of his entombment in the wheeled bed in *Sonnets of the Wingless Hours*, which are, by turns, melancholy, fantastic, philosophic, ingenious, and nearly always intensely musical. Not long afterward he "returned to the world," able to live a full life and apparently quite well, except for a slight limp. He married in 1898 Annie E. Holdsworth, a Scotch novelist. Their intense happiness together was crowned in 1903 by the birth of a daughter. But Persis, or "Mimma Bella," as the Italians called her, died within two years, and in her memory Lee-Hamilton wrote his last poetry, and his love-liest, a garland of twenty sonnets. Meanwhile his health had given away again, in the face of so much sorrow, and he died two years later.

*I know not in what metal I have wrought;
Nor whether what I fashion will be thrust
Beneath the clods that hide forgotten thought;*

*But if it is of gold it will not rust;
And when the time is ripe it will be brought
Into the sun, and glitter through its dust.*

MIMMA BELLA

IN MEMORY OF A LITTLE LIFE

I

Have dark Egyptians stolen thee away,
Oh Baby, Baby, in whose cot we peer
As down some empty gulf that opens sheer
And fathomless, illumined by no ray ?

And wilt thou come, on some far distant day,
With unknown face, and say, "Behold ! I'm here,
The child you lost"; while we in sudden fear,
Dumb with great doubt, shall find no word to say ?

One darker than dark gipsy holds thee fast;
One whose strong fingers none has forced apart
Since first they closed on things that were too fair;

Nor shall we see thee other than thou wast,
But such as thou art printed in the heart,
In changeless baby loveliness still there.

II

Two springs she saw — two radiant Tuscan springs,
What time the wild red tulips are aflame
In the new wheat, and wreaths of young vine frame
The daffodils that every light breeze swings;

And the anemones that April brings
Make purple pools, as if Adonis came
Just there to die; and Florence scrolls her name
In every blossom Primavera flings.

Now, when the scented iris, straight and tall,
Shall hedge the garden gravel once again
With pale blue flags, at May's exulting call,

And when the amber roses, wet with rain,
Shall tapestry the old grey villa wall,
We, left alone, shall seek one bud in vain.

III

If we could know the silent shapes that pass
Across our lives, we should perchance have seen
God's Messenger with dusky pinions lean
Above the cot, and scan as in the glass

Of some clear forest water, framed in grass,
The likeness of his own seraphic mien;
And heard the call, implacably serene,
Of Him who is, who will be, and who was.

Oh Azraël, why tookest thou the child
'Neath thy great wings, that lock as in a vice,
From all that is alive and warm and fond,

To where a rayless sun that never smiled
Looks down on his own face in the pale ice
Of vast and lifeless seas in the Beyond ?

IV

Oh, rosy as the lining of a shell
Were the wee hands that now are white as snows;
And like pink coral, with their elfin toes,
The feet that on life's brambles never fell.

And with its tiny smile, adorable
The mouth that never knew life's bitter sloes;
And like the incurved petal of a rose
The little ear, now deaf in Death's strong spell.

Now, while the seasons in their order roll,
And sun and rain pour down from God's great dome,
And deathless stars shine nightly overhead,

Near other children, with her little doll,
She waits the wizard that will never come
To wake the sleep-struck playground of the dead.

V

What wast thou, little baby, that art dead —
A one day's blossom that the hoar-frost nips ?
A bee that's crushed, the first bright day it sips ?
A small dropped gem that in the earth we tread ?

Or cherub's smiling gold-encircled head,
That Death from out Life's painted missal rips ?
Or murmured prayer that barely reached the lips ?
Or sonnet's fair first line — the rest unsaid ?

Oh, 'tis not hard to find what thou wast like;
The world is full of fair unfinished things
That vanish like a dawn-admonished elf.

Life teems with opening forms for Death to strike;
The woods are full of unfledged broken wings;
Enough for us, thou wast thy baby self.

VI

Oh, bless the law that veils the Future's face;
For who could smile into a baby's eyes,
Or bear the beauty of the evening skies,
If he could see what cometh on apace ?

The ticking of the death-watch would replace
The baby's prattle for the over-wise;
The breeze's murmur would become the cries
Of stormy petrels where the breakers race.

We live as moves the walker in his sleep,
Who walks because he sees not the abyss
His feet are skirting as he goes his way:

If we could see the morrow from the steep
Of our security, the soul would miss
Its footing, and fall headlong from to-day.

VII

Mantled in purple dusk, Imperial Death,
Thy throne Time's mist, thy crown the clustered stars,
Thy orb the world; — did Nature's countless wars
Yield insufficient incense for thy breath ?

Hadst not enough with all who troop beneath
Thy inward-opening gates, whose shadowy bars
Give back nor kings in their triumphal cars,
Nor the worn throngs that old age hurrieth ?

O sateless Death, most surely it was thou,
(A thousand ages, yea, and longer still,
Before the words were heard in Galilee)

That saidst with dark contraction of thy brow,
As through all Nature ran an icy chill:
"Now let the little children come to me."

VIII

One day, I mind me, now that she is dead,
When nothing warned us of the dark decree,
I crooned, to lull her, in a minor key,
Such fancies as first came into my head.

I crooned them low, beside her little bed;
And the refrain was somehow "Come with me,
And we will wander by the purple sea";
I crooned it, and — God help me ! — felt no dread.

O Purple Sea, beyond the stress of storms,
Where never ripple breaks upon the shore
Of Death's pale Isles of Twilight as they dream,

Give back, give back, O Sea of Nevermore,
The frailest of the unsubstantial forms
That leave the shores that are for those that seem !

IX

O brook that fell too soon into the sea,
That never mingled with the broader streams,
To roll through mighty cities, where the steams
Of vice and woe obscure the pageantry;

Nor passed where glorious summits, standing free,
Catch the full measure of the midday gleams;
Nor crossed the Gorges of the Evil Dreams,
And Valley of the Hopes that May not Be:

We went beside it for a little while,
Watching its play, the ripple of its smile,
Its babble as it wandered on its way;

And lo, its course was run, and it was lost,
As quickly as an evanescent frost,
In Death's dim Ocean that before us lay.

X

'Tis Christmas, and we gaze with downbent head
On something that the post has brought too late
To reach thee, Mimma, through the narrow gate,
From one that did not know that thou art dead;

A picture book, to play with on thy bed;
And we, who should have heard thee laugh and prate
So busily, sit here at war with Fate,
And turn the pages silently instead.

Oh, that I knew thee playing 'neath God's eyes,
With the small souls of all the dewy flowers
That strewed thy grave, and died at Autumn's breath;

Or with the phantom of the doll that lies
Beside thee for Eternity's long hours,
In the dim nursery that men call Death!

XI

How patiently they did their work of old,
Those cowed illuminators of the cells,
Painting their vellum from the small ribbed shells
That held the mystic carmine and the gold;

Matching God's tints in every glowing fold,
In nimbus, wing and robe; and by their spells,
Seizing the living glory in the wells
Of some great sunrise that His hand had scrolled.

They made immortal cherubs that retain,
In spite of Time and his effacing trace,
Their pristine loveliness from age to age;

As Death, the cowed one, with his brush of pain,
Illuminates some lovely baby face,
In sunrise tints on Memory's missal page.

XII

It is the season when the elves of Spring
Help up the first anemones that peep
Through the young corn, and rouse from out their sleep
The pale green hellebores for March to swing;

Before they bid the field narcissus fling
Its perfume on the furrows that they keep,
Or let the wild red tulip's flame upleap
In honour of great April's Fairy King.

O God, to think that in a spring or two
When she had learnt to run, we were to stroll
Among the fields where work the busy elves,

And see her pick the daffodils that strew
Each olive-planted terrace and sweet knoll,
And the wild tulips on the grassy shelves !

XIII

Now Florence fills her lap with buds of May,
And all, with roses, be they rich or poor,
Stream through the great cathedral's brazen door,
To get them blessed upon the Roses' Day.

Roses and yet more roses, brought away
From hundreds of wild gardens, Spring's great store,
Are blessed; but, crushed on the cathedral floor,
Lies many a bud that caught the dawn's first ray.

And so we cried: "O Priest, a bud we'll bring
For thee to bless, fresh-sprinkled by the morn,
When myriad roses crown triumphant Spring.

Late to the breeze it came, through many a thorn,
On our grey villa wall: a frail sweet thing,
Of sun and rain, of smile and sorrow born."

XIV

O pale pressed Rose-bud in the Book of Death,
Where thou outlastest many a perfect rose
That strews her petals at her full life's close
Beneath November's violating breath;

Too well thou heardest what the Spring wind saith
To the small buds of which the gods compose
Their fatal wreaths, and what May sings to those
That shall not hear what Autumn uttereth.

When Azraël turns slowly one by one
The leaves of his great Book, by pale gleam lit,
And sees thee whom he plucked by morn's bright sun.

Perhaps, O Rose-bud, in that silent place,
A wistful smile, as of regret, may flit
O'er his inscrutable angelic face.

XV

Do you remember how, with Fancy's hand,
We shaped her future as in living clay;
Modelled her life, and saw the child display
Each day fresh charm, and beauty's lines expand ?

And how, before our love could understand
What Fate was working, lo, we found one day
The image finished as but God's hand may;
And it was Death's chill marble that we scann'd ?

How well I see her on her cold white bed,
Between the branch of olive and the palm,
The little cross of pearls upon her breast;

And oh, the frozen beauty of the head,
The clear-cut lips, interminably calm,
The eye-lids sealed in pale seraphic rest !

XVI

O little ship that passed us in the night,
What sunrise wast thou bound for, as we sailed
Our longer voyage in the wind that wailed,
Across dark waves, with few great stars in sight ?

Or wast thou bound for where, in dim half light
The Isles that None Return From lie thick-veiled
In their eternal mist; and shrunk and paled,
The sun of Ghostland shines from changeless height ?

We had but time to hail and ask her name.
It sounded faint, like "Persis," and we heard
"God's haven" as the port from which she came;

Bound for . . . But in the sobbing of the wind,
And clash of waves, we failed to catch the word,
And she was gone; and we were left behind.

XVII

Do you recall the scents, the insect whirr,
Where we had laid her in the chestnut shade ?
How discs of sunlight through the bright leaves played
Upon the grass, as we bent over her ?

How roving breezes made the bracken stir
Beside her, while the bumble-bee, arrayed
In brown and gold, hummed round her, and the glade
Was strewn with last year's chestnuts' prickly fur ?

There in the forest's ripe and fragrant heat
She lay and laughed, and kicked her wee bare feet,
And stretched wee hands to grasp some woodland bell;

And played her little games; and when we said
"Cuckoo," would lift her frock, and hide her head,
Which now, God knows, is hidden but too well.

XVIII

Lo, through the open window of the room
That was her nursery, a small bright spark
Comes wandering in, as falls the summer dark,
And with a measured flight explores the gloom,

As if it sought, among the things that loom
Vague in the dusk, for some familiar mark,
And like a light on some wee unseen bark,
It tacks in search of who knows what or whom.

I know 'tis but a fire-fly; yet its flight,
So straight, so measured, round the empty bed,
Might be a little soul's that night sets free;

And as it nears, I feel my heart grow tight
With something like a superstitious dread,
And watch it breathless, lest it should be she.

XIX

What alchemy is thine, O little Child,
Transmuting all our thoughts, thou that art dead,
And making gold of all the dross of lead
That leaves the soul's pure crucible defiled;

A vaporous gold, which I would fain have piled
Upon my palette, and with light brush spread
On Death's dark background, that thy baby head
Might wear a nimbus where the angels smiled ?

Thus had I given back what thou hast wrought
In my own soul, and placed thee high among
The cherubs that are aureoled in glow;

Rimming thy brow with fine red gold of thought,
In such fair pictures as the English tongue
Shrines in its sanctuaries while ages flow.

XX

What essences from Idumean palm,
What ambergris, what sacerdotal wine,
What Arab myrrh, what spikenard would be thine,
If I could swathe thy memory in such balm !

Oh, for wrecked gold, from depths for ever calm,
To fashion for thy name a fretted shrine;
Oh, for strange gems, still locked in virgin mine,
To stud the pyx, where thought would bring sweet psalm !

I have but this small rosary of rhyme, —
No rubies but heart's drops, no pearls but tears,
To lay upon the altar of thy name,

O Mimma Bella; — on the shrine that Time
Makes ever holier for the soul, while years
Obliterate the rolls of human fame.

XVI—WILLIAM ELLERY LEONARD

[1876-

TO THE readers of *Two Lives* Leonard has dedicated his autobiography, *The Locomotive God*, which reveals a robust though hyper-sensitive personality deeply wounded by a series of terrific nervous shocks in childhood, youth and maturity. However much the rationalization in this tragic self-analysis, it illuminates profoundly all that he has written, the grandeur and the glaring imperfections. Without doubt *The Locomotive God* is one of the most honest and exciting autobiographies in existence.

Leonard was born in Plainfield, New Jersey, grew up there and in Bolton, Massachusetts, under the watchful eyes of two remarkably intelligent parents and in spite of severe economic handicaps, studied at Boston University, Bonn, Göttingen, and Columbia where he received his PH.D. in English, in 1905. At Columbia he became the life-long friend of Ludwig Lewisohn, who paints him vividly under the name of "Ellard" in *Up Stream*. Lewisohn goes so far as to say that Leonard's poetry is inferior to none that has been written on this continent. "At its best it is at least equal to the noblest passages of Emerson and it is far less fragmentary, far more sustained upon an extraordinary level of intellectual incisiveness, moral freedom and traditional beauty."

In 1906 Leonard began his long teaching career at the University of Wisconsin, in Madison, renting an attic room from an aged scholar. The following year his landlord's daughter returned. They soon fell in love, were married after an engagement of eighteen months and shortly before their second anniversary she committed suicide. This is the story of *Two Lives*, with some telescoping of time, even to the detail that in those last weeks she was typing

his translation of Lucretius and stopped with the words, "O *Mors æterna* — O eternal Death."

In the midst of intense grief Leonard put together the best of his juvenilia, which had been privately printed, with some later work, for his first volume, *The Vaunt of Men*, a modest gesture in the high tradition but generally obscured by the onrush of the "new poetry." In August 1911 after two years of gradual and largely unconscious preparation, he began the record of his tragedy and by Christmas had written the greater part of the two hundred and odd sonnet-stanzas of *Two Lives*. The manuscript was then submitted to various friends for criticism and on their suggestions several sections were modified or added. After long hesitation Leonard allowed the poem to be printed privately in 1922 and the deep stir it at once made in small circles was prophetic of its wider acceptance on publication in 1925.

Two Lives was composed as a *rounded narrative* in sonnet-stanzas, with only such gaps as there would be between the chapters of a novel, and is therefore much more closely knit than is the usual sonnet sequence, with its underlying continuity of mood or reflection. The present abridgment (for which I alone am responsible) seriously impairs this close narrative effect, but may be a gain in the direction of emotional force and total æsthetic quality. The obvious parallel to *Two Lives* is Meredith's *Modern Love* but (aside from questions of artistry) there is almost a complete contrast between the two sets of characters and the Fates which hang over them.

TWO LIVES

PART I

I

The shining City of my manhood's grief
Is girt by hills and lakes (the lakes are four),
Left me by the ice-sheet which from Labrador
Under old suns once carved this land's relief,
Ere wild men came with building and belief
Across the midland swale. And slope and shore
Still guard the forest pathos of dead lore
With burial mound of many an Indian chief,
And sacred spring. Around me, Things-to-come
Are rising (by the plans of my compeers)
For art and science, like a wiser Rome
Upon a wiser earth for wiser years. —
Large thoughts, before and after; yet they be
Time's pallid backgrounds to my soul and me.

II

I came from other labor, other times,
And other houses, half a fugitive
Till then round earth. I sought a place to live,
After my needs: a table for my rhymes
And books, a bed for sleep, for human sleep,
A friendly household, that would let me roam
Its grass and porches, like a man at home —
Yet yield (O prose of life !) its roof-tree cheap.
I wandered, hunting, many a pleasant lane
And highway under elms in arching rows,
And many a brick-paved court, with saplings set
And lilacs, rang at many doors in vain,
Whose housewives smiled . . . until, toward day's bright
close,
I spied a placard: "Attic room to let."

III

That attic room became my destiny:
In each man's life there's some excelling spot,
Indoors or out, that may not be forgot, —
Some hall whose music set his spirit free,
Some stream unbridged which lost him victory,
Some hut, some hill, determining his lot,
Dividing still what-is from what-is-not,
In life of each man — whether you or me . . .
Of which hereafter . . . But you shall not think,
You few who read my story shall not say,
“He would make big the things of everyday
By out-worn rhetoric.” For my hair is gray
Through manhood's commonplaces, and all ink
Lags ever in the rear of such as they.

IV

Wild tales of that white house were whispered me
Across the neighbor's fence. An old dame said:
“A beautiful mother paced, with bended head
And fingers, muttering monotony,
That porch in other days, and seemed to see
Only the squirrels burying nuts and bread,
Which over the rail she tossed them fitfully, —
At last they took her off; her little three
Learned all they knew of her at father's knee, —
And when she died she did not die in bed . . .
She haunts us most when waves are white to view
Under those bluffs” — and pointed down the sky —
“And now the old man is about to die,
And have you seen the old man's daughter ?” — “Who ?”

V

I met her first, half-turning up the stair,
Her foot just lifted from the rug in hall.
She stopped, as timid at her father's call.
He introduced me. She pushed back her hair
With one hand, struggling long to play the host,
Though silent, and, as if afraid to fall,
She clung and leaned against the newel-post
With the other . . . girl-and-woman lithe and tall,
In flowing saffron muslin. With full throat
And large black lashes over large blue eyes,
A queen of ladies . . . what had she to fear ?
And when I thanked her, with an anecdote
And kindly jest, for household courtesies,
She spoke, and almost laughingly drew near.

VI

Her beauty was upon me. That alone
Might well have tortured reason from its place:
To look upon that living Titian face,
And the fair Milo's form not now in stone,
And pass . . . when, though but for a little space,
In my young manhood they might be my own !
To look . . . and pass. I looked . . . and could not pass.
And unto pity for a human lot
Came that great pity Beauty had begot
(The old Vergilian truth) . . . My memory has,
Strangely, half lost her beauty; but there be
Some in the town, less close to her sweet ways,
Who still remark how beautiful was she,
As of some great event of other days.

VII

And so Life drew us both, and so Love drew
Both, both — the woman without thought at all,
So starved for chance of service all in all,
The man of thought that knew (or deemed he knew).
So reading turned to talk; and talk then grew
To little silences. Then song grew rife —
The song she most would sing to her was new:
“Freut euch des Lebens — Take ye joy of life” . . .
Turning the leaf of music, at her side,
As she ran over the keys, I kissed her hair
One night at last . . . The Old Man multiplied
And added in his study over there
Across the hall . . . That painted Face so fair
Looked down upon her daughter and — my bride.

VIII

One night when early winter had begun
With gusty snows and frosty stars to keep
Our lives still closer, and our love more deep
Than even in autumn wanderings with the sun,
One night when we together, one-and-one,
Were sitting in the cushioned window-space,
Planning some purple flower-beds for the place
After our marriage, with new vines to run
About the basement wall; one night when time
Seemed all to come, and at its coming ours,
And we (as by an irony, sublime
In its gaunt mockery of human powers !)
Drifted at last backward to clime and clime
And years and years of uncompanied hours,

IX

From her own lips I learned the awful truth —
Which, like a child of hope with perfect smile,
She babbled, O so innocent of guile —
As some adventure of an alien youth,
Rescued by white sails from a midsea isle
Of shrieking beaks and fins and claws uncouth,
Or eery dream demanding never ruth
Because but dream and vanished the long while —
As something far and strange that I should hear . . .
And why ? Because she would conceal me naught,
As bound in honor ? No. Because of fear
I'd learn of others some day ? No. — She thought
Her lover would rejoice — rejoice to share
Her exaltation after *such* despair.

X

Next day I met my classes, — but our theme
Was not the garden of Alcinous,
Nor Hector tossing up the timorous
Boy near the mother, startled at the gleam
Of bristling helmet, nor the flamy dream
Of pregnant Hecuba, nor Helen's fate
To watch the warriors from the Scaean gate,
Nor Agamemnon nor Scamander stream;
Was not of Stoa nor of Academe,
Nor the Ten Thousand's "O the sea, the sea —
Thalassa, Thalassa !" Not of Greek trireme
At Salamis, nor of Thermopylae —
But of the hereditary Oedipus
And daughter of the House of Tantalus.

XI

We act in crises not as one who dons
A judge's robe and sits to praise or blame
With walnut gavel, before high window-frame,
Beside a Justice-and-her-scales in bronze;
We act in crises not by pros and cons
Of volumes in brown calfskin still the same;
But, like the birds and beasts from which we came,
By the long trend of character — the *fons*,
Fons et origo — fountainhead and source —
Of deeper conduct, whether in unleashed hound
That tears the fleeting stag unto the ground,
Or thrush in battle for its fledgeling's corse,
Or boy who sees the cracked dam, hears a sound,
And down the peopled valley spurs his horse.

XII

Now each new Warning died with its first voice,
A phantom, a shrill echo, slain at birth
Upon the threshold of the House of Mirth:
For Warnings came, but yet there was no choice;
No choice forevermore! New Warnings came;
But came too late: Her dear sweet random ways
Would more and more reveal their tragic phase
(As of a candle with unsteady flame,
Through fierce combustion of uncouth element) —
Proving that love itself, though it can put
Light in the eyeball, swiftness in the foot,
Cannot restring, within its choral tent,
The mind 'twould play on (as a lyre or lute),
When God has tampered with the instrument.

XIII

New Warnings came: secure in her new life,
She told me of her olden search for death
Thrice thwarted by her father, when with breath
Thrice choked in foamy agony of strife
Under the summer waters off our pier,
Thrice had she felt his hand on matted hair,
Been thrice recalled, as he put forth a hand
Over the gunwale, to love and longer here
Among the living, with love not anywhere —
Thrice in the years ere I had come inland.
Yes, from her story a new Warning came
Of impulse ineradicable and sure:
And Death to her was still a shining lure
(Though hid awhile), as for the moth the flame.

XIV

New Warnings came: building the fire, I spied
A crumpled letter with my name, and caught
Some phrases zigzag in the folds, their thought
Leaping into my face: . . . "*marriage*" . . . "*have died*" . . .
"*Avoid those matters and*" . . . "*we're justified*" . . .
So I unfolded (and why not?). From then
My faith was shaken in two righteous men —
Plotting 'gainst me, yet plotting for my bride,
The sister, daughter. I was welcome there
As "the solution of her future" — means,
Not manhood, was I unto father, son:
But did they reckon how that deed unfair
Would work across the drama's later scenes
In my own dealings with my lovely one? —

XV

She lacked all analytic to infer,
Knew not my suffering; though afterward,
When things with us began to go so hard,
She felt, she knew what I'd become for her
Or tried to: "O my knight, my rescuer,
From cave and forest, O my savior-prince,
For whom I waited, O long since, long since,
Without your coming, where and whither were
My steps today!" — Her poignant gratitude
Would shame me into silence, into fear —
For on her lashes there would be the tear,
And something not of earth in her wild mood.
And from my neck I would unwind her arms,
And quiet hers and hide my own alarms.

XVI

Mid-morning of mid-June: Her sudden whim
Among the guests (who chatted ill at ease):
"O let's be married out beneath the trees —
This mantel with its garlands is so prim."
As if she said, "Let's row an hour or swim";
As if she said, "Let's pick the white sweet pease,
And leave the pink and purple for the bees";
As if she said, "Let's get the shears and trim
The lilac stems" . . . Blue lake and bluer sky
Merged with the green of earth, of odorous earth,
A scarlet tanager went flashing by,
The unseen thrasher sang with all his mirth . . .
The old dame neighbor said with happy tears:
"The sweetest wedding of my eighty years."

XVII

Pretending we'd been married long and long . . .
Was it some subtle feeling that she'd striven
To conjure Time beyond what Time had given,
Or was to give, that suddenly choked my song ? —
Or was't that whosoever with keen nerve
Too closely stares upon that charmèd brink,
The gliding shimmer of that green downward curve,
Is wooed from all tomorrows, as to sink
One with the waters ? . . . But I broke the spell
Before I plunged . . . said nothing . . . yet 'twas then
Came horror, as to the House of Mirth, again —
As when she told me of her prayer in Hell . . .
That night we rode into the West-of-men,
To this our city of the Fair-and-well.

PART II

I

I did not doom her: for, if clear am I
From rhyme to rhyme, this is a story of
How Time and Circumstance gave birth to love,
How Time and Circumstance did crucify,
With manhood's reason standing helpless by,
Almost to madness. Time and Circumstance
Unto the oak-trees of that haunted manse
Shackled our feet. I did not doom her. Why ? —
“And now the Old Man is about to die,”
Neighbors had told me. And new months of life
Made her not less the daughter in the wife
The more his own life lacked for hand and eye: —
A grey head nodding in a pillowed chair
Kept me the husband, her the daughter, there.

II

The Old Man grumbled, as with slippered steps
He pattered after her, or as in dream
He sadly chuckled at "the new Regime,"
Quoting fresh tidbits from Montaigne or Pepys
On wives and women and old age. And I
By the stern instinct of man's husbandhood,
Now eager to contract with fame and good
Beyond the home, would sometimes hurry by,
When she would stop me: "Set the flower-pot,
My lady, as you like, on stand or sill, —
But on my head I pray you set it not" —
(And yet that then she laughed is something still).
And sometimes, too, she seemed the restless child,
In her home-making, of vagrant fancies wild.

III

Too anxious was I! Hear me, friends, nor blame;
You'll pity her — her in the slumberland —
O pity me? . . . no, no! — but understand
The lonely man who gave the girl his name!
Like to "a candle with unsteady flame
Through fierce combustion of uncouth element"
I said she burned, not only her merriment
Being thus random in device and aim:
For, though a gentlewoman, read in books,
Deep wisdom often in her simple talk
(Deeper than ocean's, fresher than the brook's),
Though deft of finger with needle, flower, or chalk,
Though striving ever with prayer and plan to be
In feeling poised, in conduct firm and free

IV

(Striving so piteously !), she grew as one
Forever apart from all good wives of earth;
'Twas not alone each mood gave impulse birth,
Before a thought could check, in rain or sun;
But thoughts themselves clasped in false unison
How often, quaintly incoordinate;
And memory lapsed both when she walked and sate,
And clock would strike with promised task undone.
Then, too, her vision of life, its lures, its lies,
Its garrulous people stepping to and fro,
Was prised through her own peculiar eyes
By light which through them from within would flow.
(She lacked — O terrible beauty of her fate —
Uncannily all power to doubt or hate.)

V

But I, grown fatuous in my love and lore —
Love that I thought was round her as a buoy,
Lore that I thought was cunning to destroy
Disease and doom — toiled with her more and more:
My skill at mind should train the wild away,
The wild and eery, from that brow I kissed,
Till she should grow like girls of everyday
Through me (triumphant lover-alienist !), —
Thus to establish her in selfhood strong
Against disasters I was fearsome of —
Pain, slander, grief, and all gaunt broods of Life, —
Thus, also, to establish her as wife —
As apt in judgment as she was in song,
As fixed in purpose as she was in love.

VI

What issued from that schooling ? That I'll write
Brief as the dot-and-dash that spells "He's dead"
Upon the wire for one who waits in dread —
Brief — for at best I shall not sleep tonight:
My watchfulness, too anxious, alert, and sly,
Became suspicion of every act and word,
And many a motion, as natural as a bird,
I tortured to a hint of brain awry.
My lessoning, even where my judgment kept
Its finger on her perilous part, became,
In its long, sad futility, a flame
That chafed, that gnawed me when I waked or slept.
Thus sometimes (name me by the brutal name !)
I chided, I rebuked her — and she wept.

VII

"Striving so piteously": she hung a slate
Once near the closet (where her kimonos were
And green felt slippers). That she might not err
From the best conduct of true wife and mate,
That she might grow in strength from date to date
As mistress of the wildness harrying her,
She wrote thereon (for discipline and spur)
Sundry reminders. But these too showed fate:
In their brief pathos, changed from day to day,
Loving resolves, O often so bizarre,
And self-set tasks of homely 'yea and nay,'
'Thuswise and thus' (which she forgot alway),
They too showed fate and fate not very far, —
And the handwriting on the wall were they.

VIII

I found a paper on her chiffonier —
Manilla wrapping of a scarf or gloves, —
I read in penciling: "He says, my love's
More than my tact . . . a child of fifteen year. . .
He says he wishes I were more like sister. . .
He says he needs" — and there I saw her stand
In the door, white-plume on head, her shopping in hand,
Smiles on her lips. She came to me . . . I kissed her . . .
She marked . . . Her face fell on my shoulder; so
We clung together. "I'm so sorry, friend,
You found my scrawl." — "I love you, child." — "I
know." —
"Forgive." — " 'Twas for my good — and there's an end."
The rest was silence — the embrace and kiss
Of love with love upon the precipice.

IX

We used to talk, beside the crackling grate
(Between the pages of a Grecian play),
We used to talk so often (after day
Had merged to summer's moonlight low and late),
As she undid her hair, of man and mate
And that one sorrow (bred by love) to come,
When one or other should lie stark and dumb,
With one or other walking desolate.
"Were it not better I were first to go?"
And she would fold me round: "No, no, O no!"
And though I shuddered, musing the reverse,
Her twofold meaning I was quick to guess:
My love defended her from that dread curse,
And her life counted in the world for less,

X

I've seen the Poets' Houses: Sirmio
Amid its olives where the Garda laves
The ivied ruin still with Lydian waves,
And Casa Magni and its sea below
(Blue Mediterranean in autumnal glow),
And Diodati on Geneva shore,
And the stone house by Ponte Vecchio,
And those Venetian Palaces of yore,
And flowery doorway on the Isle of Wight,
The gables by the Avon's winding mead,
The windows near Winander in the light,
The Gothic Abbey on the river Tweed:—
But by the waters of this earth of flowers
Were none more fit than that white house of ours—

XI

Had it been *ours*, had she been *mine*. — A fate
Ironic, not alone in scope of plot,
But in each tragic detail, shaped my lot,
With cunning masterstroke from date to date.
The poet-scholar walked that fair estate
With love and all the muses, in his prime
For honorable deeds of prose and rhyme, —
Yet poison in each fruit and herb he ate.
Was't not enough that Madness harbored there,
At the house beside the waters (on the wall
In painted smile, and in the perilous stuff
Of Love's own brain whispering of Otherwhere),
And that Old Age was tottering down the hall,
With querulous fingers? Was it not enough?

XII

'Twas not enough, it seems. O House of Death,
Of Madness, of Old Age, of Love-in-terror,
White house whose fatal beauty flattereth !
I thought 't had been enough — and mine the error
And mine the suffrance with each pulse and breath
In the lone after-years ! “A poet's House,”
Her voice memorial on the night wind saith.
“Nun hoch der Dichter ! — bald ist alles aus !”
Say I — so toast me, friends. . . Am I, too, mad —
By slow infection of that pictured face ?
Or have I sucked the taint from Love's red lips,
That thus I rant and ramble ? — (If I had,
O only had ! — and found with her my place
In that dim Valley of the moon's eclipse !)

XIII

No ! Mad ? Not I ! But subtle analyst
Even in my grief ; yet for a moment borne
On to sardonic laughter of a grim scorn
Against the everlasting Ironist ! —
But feel the even blood-beat on my wrist
With your enquiring thumb — am I not calm,
Again as you ? Press on my brow your palm —
Where is the fever ? Smite with knuckled fist
Against my crossed leg at the swinging knee —
My nerves are steady, good neurologist, —
And with firm art's supreme austerity,
I still can draw the face I once had kissed. . .
Can still report the voice. . . The tale shall be
Unfolded to the uttermost. . . Then list :

XIV

I said his child for long had loved him so,
So pitied his desolation, his gray decline.
Though I too tried at pity, I opine,
For her sweet sake, yet forth from this, new woe,
Forth from her pitying love, began to grow:
She would be faithful to her father's line,
And faithful yet to me who called her mine,
Whilst father and husband on her overthrow
Each worked, by rendering her twofold task
Tenfold impossible. Distracted, torn,
Beside her bed the loving God she'd ask
Each winter evening, and again each morn
(The merciful God upon the great white throne):
"Help me to do my duty to my own."

XV

She would please two — two fatal opposites:
Husband and sire, young manhood and old age,
Who had, besides, their fatal heritage —
Distrust and aims diverse. Now there he sits
(His ledger in his lap): "Pray, use your wits;
You think too anxiously about him; go
Play with your sister's baby, daughter — so
Leave him to mumble in his moping fits."
(This, as she pleaded for my happiness,
In house of torment and distraction.) There,
O there he sits (his ledger on his knee);
And talks good doctrine how to break or bless
A wildered husband, — which in her despair
Ever and ever she comes and tells to me.

XVI

Her end is yonder, certain as the night
Above a stavèd ship with mortal list;
But do you mark, O wise psychologist,
Each cunning means ? Each subtle pang and blight ? —
Whereof but one had been enough to smite
The brain of woman in her bridal song,
Had it been bound with bands tenfold more strong
Than the doomed lady's in the House of White;
And yonder my collapse, sure as the abyss
Beneath the broken thigh, the bleeding nail
Of clinging mountaineer; but do you trace
Each ineluctable Antithesis ? —
Whereof but one had hurled from off the trail
A manhood tenfold mine in pride of place ?

XVII

What meanwhile of a child of her, of me, —
Of womb of woman and of loins of man ? —
A child of such a stock and born to be
Nurtured in such convulsions ? Did I ban
From out my griefs a child ? And did I save
Some unborn creature, third in that mad line,
Some lovely woman, from an insane grave,
Some blue-eyed daughter that had still been mine ?
I did: we had no child, but yet from this,
From this and dread lest on some morrow she
Should witness nature's old fecundity,
Stole morrow by morrow something from her kiss:
Probe life, and know that this and such a dread
Puts a black pall upon a marriage-bed.

XVIII

What meanwhile of my work for world of men?
What of the Grecian Isles and Marathon,
And phalanx that went forth with Philip's son
To slay dusk hordes beyond the Asian fen? —
What of my solemn midnights with the pen,
The critic's insight and the poet's song? —
Was I at last to be thus thwarted, then, —
I who had struggled for those things so long? . . .
To know my story to the lowest pit,
Circle by circle down to deepest Hell,
Needs must you know Ambition has in it
Meanings that woman's love alone can spell:
Though I said little, she sensed my bondage, she, . . .
And brooded (unbeknown) . . . to set me free.

XIX

We found him dead one morn between the sheets . . .
The veterans of his legions came and took;
And there was martial music down the streets,
And at the grave the reading of the Book, —
Unto the earth they gave him with his sword,
With the rent flag of battles south and west;
And his commission (laid across his breast)
Bore name of Lincoln, as his overlord.
So let me leave him: he was old and ill,
And his white house had wrought upon his brain;
So let me leave him, or as hearing still
His talk of Shakespeare even in his pain . . .
Good night, grim comrade (a deep sleep be thine!),
Whose own wife went the way of mine — of mine. . .

XX

I took her thither on the morrow's dawn:
With backs against our City's westward land,
We stood amid the thickets hand in hand,
Where men as yet had made no walk nor lawn;
From where the Indian beauty seemed withdrawn
Scarcely as yet, and Indian solitude
Seemed on the glittering waters, on the wood,
And on the banded clouds of that Spring dawn.
And then I counted paces left and right
Along the slope: "Look, here between the brush
We'll set our house, facing the morning light,
And waken with the wakening of the thrush"
(The bird that she loved best) . . . She nodded head,
She smiled. . . "Not so?" . . . "Dear husband, yes," she
said.

XXI

Lo, had begun again for her the time,
The cyclic time (through Nature's fixed decree),
That woman in her large fecundity
Shares with the barren moon in every clime:
Ten times in the revolving year plus three,
As often as the moon moves round the earth,
Whether a savage, queen, or peasant she,
Then must she pause amid her toil or mirth;
And, as a priestess under holy law,
Pour the Great Mother, pour with reeling brain,
Pour, often with the mystic rites of pain,
Libations of the purple blood of awe,
Blood of no sheep with fillets girdled thrice—
From her own body is the sacrifice.

XXII

The Cosmic Rhythms have old right of way,
And roll through man as through the heaving sea:
Should the moon stop above us just for me,
Because I neared the Valley of Death that day ?
Should the Great Mother mercifully delay, —
As satiate with ten million women's pine, —
Delay her workings on this one of mine,
Because my wife in grief, in madness lay,
Already stricken ? — Onward still and on
The Cosmic Rhythms roll; I've felt, I've thought,
And I have mated man and star and sun
As of one pulse, one breath, one being wrought,
With gain and loss alike for sun, man, star —
Because ('tis all we know), because they are.

XXIII

She dressed in white that morning and she passed
So slow, so aimless (*was* she without aim,
Without some purpose that she dared not name ?)
From room to room; and now and then she cast
Such piteous love upon me here and there.
I rang my Colleague on the phone to say
"Write on the board, 'my class won't meet to-day'";
And strove to still my terror and despair
That I might conquer hers. — All, all was vain,
And turned to dead-sea apples, ashes all,
Or rather into quick-lime in her brain, —
All that I did or said. She heard my call
Upon the phone. . . 'My work was more than she,'
She thought (and brooded still . . . to set me free).

XXIV

"This is the red rose, dear, and this the white,
The white rose this, beloved, this the red,"
As I unpinned the paper, thus I said;
"Love's passion and Love's purity — ere night
You'll laugh with their green stems amid your hair."
She set in slender vase of blue and gold
(I never saw them after), with slow stare
Put hands upon my shoulders (as of old ? —
Not quite), and gazed long and unspeakably. . .
"These flowers I wore upon my wedding dress." . .
A pause. . . "O my poor husband . . . must it be ?"
Then clung so close, as in a wilderness. . .
And then would dart away. . . "You mustn't go —
Come back; come, sing the cheeriest song you know."

XXV

An instant — leapt — leapt — followed. — In the hall
I heard the click of key on upper floor —
Strength left my knees — I could but crawl and crawl —
And trembled groping to her chamber door —
I heard the rattling of a box — a knife ? —
Razor at throat ? — the panel — shall I break ? —
Perhaps it's nothing — I grip the knob, — "My wife !
O open ! Open for your husband's sake !" —
She opened . . . with a vision on her face,
And hands uplifted to immortal things,
And past me flew . . . upon her toilet case
An emptied glass with foam in awful rings,
And a green bottle labelled with the red
Letters that shrieked upon me, "*She is dead !*"

PART III

I

How little do they know of sorrow, they
Who in the early months of death and dust
In vain commiseration feel they must
Guide their friend's thoughts from what had passed away,
So torturingly fearful lest they say
Aught to remind. — Aught to remind of death ! —
As if with every pulse, with every breath,
Death were not talking to him night and day !
But then, when time has led him by the hand
Some kindly footsteps from the grave, and he
Begins at last to look about the land,
Then, witless of the subtle irony,
They name old things and torture him again,
Raking to fire the buried coals in brain.

II

I will not fear myself, will not fear truth,
And here shall be arraignment without stint.
I will hold court against my sinful youth,
And all the findings shall be checked in print.
"Item: you fostered a bastard Love-of-fame
Begot on Vanity when still a lad, —
What if you saw that creature going lame ? —
What if — when the dear wife was going mad !
What was the peril of Ambition's goal
(Self feeding self, when all is understood),
Against the peril of a human soul,
And that the soul you loved, or said you would ?
You have your full reward: the wife is dead —
And your ambition be upon your head.

III

"Item: you would not meet the issue face
To questioning face: you paltered, eyes astrife
With each mere moment, would not see its place
With years and the enduring laws of life;
And when betimes that Reason which you boast
Did chart some hint of larger meanings there,
Did it, like pilot off a storm-beat coast,
Devise and act to steer you anywhere?
No. But, astrut, like smug Tragedian,
You mouthed high sentences, and satisfied
Your sense of things-awry, your heart-of-man,
With analytic, passion, gesture, pride.
You have your full reward: the wife is dead —
And all your rhetoric be upon your head.

IV

What flower has been planted on her grave,
I wonder? By her sister? Rose or rue?
Who crops the grass? Or spring the violets blue,
Blue, white, and wilding? What great branches wave,
The pine or poplar, by the iron fence? —
(Was there a fence?) — And have you set a stone,
With dates of coming hither, going hence,
And carved a name that ends as ends my own? —
And would you save a place for me thereunder,
Beside her? (Is the father's grave by hers,
Or by the dear, drowned mother's grave, I wonder?) . . .
O these my rhymes seem uncouth questioners —
When I bethink me 'tis a husband's pen
Has writ them down, whom none will answer then.

V

What is it like (you ask perplexed), this fear ? —
Fancy yourself compelled to walk a plank
From cliff to lofty cliff with reeling shank;
Fancy yourself a swimmer, in the rear
Of some white ship that nevermore draws near;
Fancy yourself entangled in the dank
Morasses, with the elephants that sank,
As sole companions, save the moon's half-sphere —
'Tis like such times. The safe bright world of tree
And dell and house is round me where I roam,
But so estranged, through what's estranged in me,
That it seems horribly no more my home. . .
In mood, the lost, the panic-stricken child;
In intellect, the man, from joy exiled.

VI

Like one who solves some curious alphabet
Upon a desert stele. . . But perhaps
I am too near the tempests of collapse
To tongue their awful intimacies yet
For the articulate world. . . And if *I* grow
By suffering, where is she ? . . . And shall we meet
Somewhere again along the Cosmic Flow,
I and the woman of the winding-sheet ? —
All proofs and guesses of ten thousand years
Never have dried one orphaned heart its tears:
I have no proof and but a shadow-guess,
And yet I've never wept. . . But should we meet,
Would *she* still know me after my distress,
Would *I* still find the words wherewith to greet ?

VII

Like one who solves some curious alphabet
On desert stele . . . and then solves a word . . .
Though the God's whispering I never heard,
And though my eyes were cruelly unwet
(Harshly encountering so much to do),
I know how ineradicably absurd
That Man is but a function of the Two,
Physics and Chemistry — that we can spell
By atom and motion (or by twitch and cell)
The ineffable Adventure I've been through . . .
I know Love, Pain, and Power are spirit-things,
My act a more than Mine or Now or Near;
One with the Will that suffers, conquers, sings,
I was the mystic Voice I could not hear.

VIII

This is the hill . . . and over my city's towers,
Across the world from sunset, yonder in air,
Shrines, through its scaffoldings, a civic dome
Of piled masonry, which shall be ours
To give, completed, to our children there . . .
And yonder far roof of my abandoned home
Shall house new laughter. . . Yet I tried. . . I tried. . .
And, ever wistful of the doom to come,
I built her many a fire for love . . . for mirth . . .
(When snows were falling on our oaks outside,
Dear, many a winter fire upon the hearth) . . .
(. . . farewell . . . farewell . . . farewell . . .)
We dare not think too long on those who died,
While still so many yet must come to birth.

XVII—RUPERT BROOKE

[1887-1915]

THE post-war reaction has temporarily obscured the name of Rupert Brooke and now it is often said that his famous group of sonnets, "1914," was "not so much a great poem as a great piece of war propaganda" and actually inferior to some of his earlier work. He himself was the very dream of what a poet should be, so attractive, handsome, and brilliant a figure that the legend of him may well outlive the memory of his verses.

He was born at Rugby, his father being assistant master of the school. There he was educated and later at King's College, Cambridge, where he founded the Marlowe Dramatic Society and took the classical tripos in 1909. Two years later his *Poems* appeared as well as the first volume of *Georgian Poetry* which he had suggested. After some time spent in Germany and Italy, he returned to live near Cambridge, at the Old Vicarage, Grantchester, which is the subject of one of his most charming poems. It was here that he wrote his excellent dissertation for a Cambridge fellowship on *John Webster and the Elizabethan Drama* which is evidence, with some of his book reviews, that he might have become one of the leading critics of his generation. In 1913 he started on a trip around the world, stopping off in America and the South Seas where he wrote *Retrospect*, the amusing *Heaven*, and *The Great Lover*, a catalogue of his passions for all homely and simple and earthy things.

Returning to England shortly before the outbreak of the war, Brooke enlisted as a matter of course ("Well, if Armageddon's on, I suppose one should be there.") and received a commission in the Royal Naval Division. He took part in the disastrous expedition to Antwerp and early

in 1915 sailed for Gallipoli, but died of blood poison at Scyros where he was buried. The "1914" sonnets were written while Brooke was training, between the Antwerp siege and sailing for the Ægean. Undoubtedly they are among the supreme expressions of English patriotism and among the few notable poems produced by the Great War. The later war-poetry took on a very different note, — harsh, disillusioned, bitter.

1914

I

PEACE

Now, God be thanked Who has watched us with His hour,
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping,
With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,
To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping,
Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary,
Leave the sick hearts that honour could not move,
And half-men, and their dirty songs and dreary,
And all the little emptiness of love !

Oh ! we, who have known shame, we have found release
there,
Where there's no ill, no grief, but sleep has mending,
Naught broken save this body, lost but breath;
Nothing to shake the laughing heart's long peace there
But only agony, and that has ending;
And the worst friend and enemy is but Death.

II

SAFETY

Dear ! of all happy in the hour, most blest
He who has found our hid security,
Assured in the dark tides of the world that rest,
And heard our word, 'Who is so safe as we ?'
We have found safety with all things undying,
The winds, and morning, tears of men and mirth,
The deep night, and birds singing, and clouds flying,
And sleep, and freedom, and the autumnal earth.
We have built a house that is not for Time's throwing.
We have gained a peace unshaken by pain for ever.
War knows no power. Safe shall be my going,
Secretly armed against all death's endeavour;
Safe though all safety's lost; safe where men fall;
And if these poor limbs die, safest of all.

III

THE DEAD

Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead !
There's none of these so lonely and poor of old,
But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold.
These laid the world away; poured out the red
Sweet wine of youth; gave up the years to be
Of work and joy, and that unhopèd serene,
That men call age; and those who would have been,
Their sons, they gave, their immortality.

Blow, bugles, blow! They brought us, for our dearth,
Holiness, lacked so long, and Love, and Pain.
Honour has come back, as a king, to earth,
And paid his subjects with a royal wage;
And Nobleness walks in our ways again;
And we have come into our heritage.

IV

THE DEAD

These hearts were woven of human joys and cares,
Washed marvellously with sorrow, swift to mirth.
The years had given them kindness. Dawn was theirs,
And sunset, and the colours of the earth.
These had seen movements, and heard music; known
Slumber and waking; loved; gone proudly friended;
Felt the quick stir of wonder; sat alone;
Touched flowers and furs and cheeks. All this is ended.

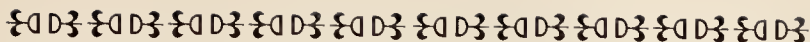
There are waters blown by changing winds to laughter
And lit by the rich skies, all day. And after,
Frost, with a gesture, stays the waves that dance
And wandering loveliness. He leaves a white
Unbroken glory, a gathered radiance,
A width, a shining peace, under the night.

V

THE SOLDIER

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.



XVIII—ALAN SEEGER

[1888-1916]

*I have a rendezvous with Death
At some disputed barricade,
When Spring comes back with rustling shade
And apple-blossoms fill the air—
I have a rendezvous with Death
When Spring brings back blue days and fair.*

A FEW months later Alan Seeger was killed in a fierce charge on a flaming town, and perhaps only that poem will keep his name from perishing utterly. He was not of the stature of Brooke, or Sassoon, or Owen. He had no unique melody of his own. Yet this very lack enabled him to express perfectly youth's simple hedonism, the conventional philosophy of Bohemia and the romantic reaction to the war, before the great disgust.

He was born on Manhattan Island, spent two memorable years in Mexico City and went through Harvard, where he read omnivorously. Then, after a disillusioning period in Greenwich Village, he proceeded, in 1912, to the familiar allurements of Paris. There he wrote pleasantly of gay crowds, of the need to love, and of one

*Who measures life's attainment by the hours
That joy has rescued from oblivion.*

Three weeks after the outbreak of the war Seeger enlisted in the Foreign Legion, out of love for France and lust for experience, "to sound the wildest debauch in life." And the selections published from his letters and diaries prove that he was not disappointed. For nearly two years, in spite of great hardships, he seems to have lived in the midst of a glorious adventure. A new vigor and a new fatalism came over his poetry, for he had ceased to be the carefree

sipper at life's lees. Of these last crowded months the sonnets are a tremulous record, ending thirteen days before his death.

LAST SONNETS

I

Sidney, in whom the heyday of romance
Came to its precious and most perfect flower,
Whether you tourneyed with victorious lance
Or brought sweet roundelays to Stella's bower,
I give myself some credit for the way
I have kept clean of what enslaves and lowers,
Shunned the ideals of our present day
And studied those that were esteemed in yours;
For, turning from the mob that buys Success
By sacrificing all Life's better part,
Down the free roads of human happiness
I frolick, poor of purse but light of heart,
And lived in strict devotion all along
To my three idols — Love and Arms and Song.

II

Not that I always struck the proper mean
Of what mankind must give for what they gain,
But, when I think of those whom dull routine
And the pursuit of cheerless toil enchain,
Who from their desk-chairs seeing a summer cloud
Race through blue heaven on its joyful course
Sigh sometimes for a life less cramped and bowed,
I think I might have done a great deal worse;
For I have ever gone untied and free,
The stars and my high thoughts for company;
Wet with the salt-spray and the mountain showers,
I have had the sense of space and amplitude,
And love in many places, silver-shoed,
Has come and scattered all my path with flowers.

III

Why should you be astonished that my heart,
Plunged for so long in darkness and in dearth,
Should be revived by you, and stir and start
As by warm April now, reviving Earth ?
I am the field of undulating grass
And you the gentle perfumed breath of Spring,
And all my lyric being, when you pass,
Is bowed and filled with sudden murmuring.
I asked you nothing and expected less,
But, with that deep, impassioned tenderness
Of one approaching what he most adores,
I only wished to lose a little space
All thought of my own life, and in its place
To live and dream and have my joy in yours.

IV

TO . . . IN CHURCH

If I was drawn here from a distant place,
'Twas not to pray nor hear our friend's address,
But, gazing once more on your winsome face,
To worship there Ideal Loveliness.
On that pure shrine that has too long ignored
The gifts that once I brought so frequently
I lay this votive offering, to record
How sweet your quiet beauty seemed to me.
Enchanting girl, my faith is not a thing
By futile prayers and vapid psalm-singing
To vent in crowded nave and public pew.
My creed is simple: that the world is fair,
And beauty the best thing to worship there,
And I confess it by adoring you.

V

Seeing you have not come with me, nor spent
This day's suggestive beauty as we ought,
I have gone forth alone and been content
To make you mistress only of my thought.
And I have blessed the fate that was so kind
In my life's agitations to include
This moment's refuge where my sense can find
Refreshment, and my soul beatitude.
Oh, be my gentle love a little while!
Walk with me sometimes. Let me see you smile.
Watching some night under a wintry sky,
Before the charge, or on the bed of pain,
These blessed memories shall revive again
And be a power to cheer and fortify.

VI

Oh, you are more desirable to me
Than all I staked in an impulsive hour,
Making my youth the sport of chance, to be
Blighted or torn in its most perfect flower;
For I think less of what that chance may bring
Than how, before returning into fire,
To make my dearest memory of the thing
That is but now my ultimate desire.
And in old times I should have prayed to her
Whose haunt the groves of windy Cyprus were,
To prosper me and crown with good success
My will to make of you the rose-twined bowl
From whose inebriating brim my soul
Shall drink its last of earthly happiness.

VII

There have been times when I could storm and plead,
But you shall never hear me supplicate.
These long months that have magnified my need
Have made my asking less importunate,
For now small favors seem to me so great
That not the courteous lovers of old time
Were more content to rule themselves and wait,
Easing desire with discourse and sweet rhyme.
Nay, be capricious, willful; have no fear
To wound me with unkindness done or said,
Lest mutual devotion make too dear
My life that hangs by a so slender thread,
And happy love unnerve me before May
For that stern part that I have yet to play.

VIII

Oh, love of woman, you are known to be
A passion sent to plague the hearts of men;
For every one you bring felicity
Bringing rebuffs and wretchedness to ten.
I have been oft where human life sold cheap
And seen men's brains spilled out about their ears
And yet that never cost me any sleep;
I lived untroubled and I shed no tears.
Fools prate how war is an atrocious thing;
I always knew that nothing it implied
Equalled the agony of suffering
Of him who loves and loves unsatisfied.
War is a refuge to a heart like this;
Love only tells it what true torture is.

IX

Well, seeing I have no hope, then let us part;
Having long taught my flesh to master fear,
I should have learned by now to rule my heart,
Although, Heaven knows, 'tis not so easy near.
Oh, you were made to make men miserable
And torture those who would have joy in you,
But I, who could have loved you, dear, so well,
Take pride in being a good loser too;
And it has not been wholly unsuccess,
For I have rescued from forgetfulness
Some moments of this precious time that flies,
Adding to my past wealth of memory
The pretty way you once looked up at me,
Your low, sweet voice, your smile, and your dear eyes.

X

I have sought Happiness, but it has been
A lovely rainbow, baffling all pursuit,
And tasted Pleasure, but it was a fruit
More fair of outward hue than sweet within.
Renouncing both, a flake in the ferment
Of battling hosts that conquer or recoil,
There only, chastened by fatigue and toil,
I knew what came the nearest to content.
For there at least my troubled flesh was free
From the gadfly Desire that plagued it so;
Discord and Strife were what I used to know,
Heartaches, deception, murderous jealousy;
By War transported far from all of these,
Amid the clash of arms I was at peace.

XI

BELLINGLISE — I

Deep in the sloping forest that surrounds
The head of a green valley that I know,
Spread the fair gardens and ancestral grounds
Of Bellinglise, the beautiful château.
Through shady groves and fields of unmown grass,
It was my joy to come at dusk and see,
Filling a little pond's untroubled glass,
Its antique towers and mouldering masonry.
Oh, should I fall to-morrow, lay me here,
That o'er my tomb, with each reviving year,
Wood-flowers may blossom and the wood-doves croon;
And lovers by that unrecorded place,
Passing, may pause, and cling a little space,
Close-bosomed, at the rising of the moon.

XII

BELLINGLISE — 2

Here, where in happier times the huntsman's horn
Echoing from far made sweet midsummer eves,
Now serried cannon thunder night and morn,
Tearing with iron the greenwood's tender leaves.
Yet has sweet Spring no particle withdrawn
Of her old bounty; still the song-birds hail,
Even through our fusillade, delightful Dawn;
Even in our wire bloom lilies of the vale.
You who love flowers, take these; their fragile bells
Have trembled with the shock of volleyed shells,
And in black nights when stealthy foes advance
They have been lit by the pale rockets' glow
That o'er scarred fields and ancient towns laid low
Trace in white fire the brave frontiers of France.

XIII

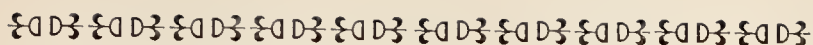
ON RETURNING TO THE FRONT AFTER LEAVE

Apart sweet women (for whom Heaven be blessed),
Comrades, you cannot think how thin and blue
Look the leftovers of mankind that rest,
Now that the cream has been skimmed off in you.
War has its horrors, but has this of good —
That its sure processes sort out and bind
Brave hearts in one intrepid brotherhood
And leave the shams and imbeciles behind.
Now turn we joyful to the great attacks,
Not only that we face in a fair field
Our valiant foe and all his deadly tools,
But also that we turn disdainful backs
On that poor world we scorn yet die to shield —
That world of cowards, hypocrites, and fools.

XIV¹

Clouds rosy-tinted in the setting sun,
Depths of the azure eastern sky between,
Plains where the poplar-bordered highways run,
Patched with a hundred tints of brown and green, —
Beauty of Earth, when in thy harmonies
The cannon's note has ceased to be a part,
I shall return once more and bring to these
The worship of an undivided heart.
Of those sweet potentialities that wait
For my heart's deep desire to fecundate
I shall resume the search, if Fortune grants;
And the great cities of the world shall yet
Be golden frames for me in which to set
New masterpieces of more rare romance.

¹ This was Seeger's last poem, enclosed in a letter written from the front on June 21, 1916. On the evening of July 4 he was killed in a charge on the village of Belloy-en-Santerre.



XIX — EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

[1892-]

IT IS POSSIBLE that two American women have risen beyond Mrs. Browning and Christina Rossetti, to occupy the poetic empyrean alone with Sappho: Emily Dickinson, the mysterious recluse of Amherst whose work was slowly parcelled out after her death; and Edna St. Vincent Millay, a shining figure in American literature for nearly two decades, although she is not yet forty. The one wrote in curiously simple yet heterodox measures, while the other has confined herself to the most conventional forms, especially the sonnet, of which there are sixty-eight in five small volumes.

Miss Millay was nineteen, a senior at Vassar, when she wrote *Renascence*, not only an astonishing achievement for one so young but one of the unforgettable utterances of this generation. It was the surprising feature of *The Lyric Year*, an anthology of 1912, and gave the title to her first book, published in 1917. Her more popular reputation came from the much slighter work in *A Few Figs from Thistles*, which is full of delightful, quotable impertinences. *The Buck in the Snow and Other Poems* (1928) is deeply serious throughout.

To quote Miss Harriet Monroe, the distinguished editor of *Poetry*: "Miss Millay's most confessional lyrics are in sonnet form, and among them are a number which can hardly be forgotten so long as English literature endures, and one or two which will rank among the best of a language extremely rich in beautiful sonnets. It is a pity that the poet ever broke up the series of *Twenty Sonnets* published in *Reedy's Mirror* during April and May 1920, and afterwards scattered, all but two of them, through the volumes entitled *Second April*, *Figs from Thistles*, and

The Harp-weaver. About three-fourths of the twenty belong together in a sequence which should be restored, a sequence which might be entitled *Winged Love* since it portrays the ecstasy and bitter brevity of passion."

The *Twenty Sonnets* are here brought together again in their original order. They include Miss Millay's finest achievements in this form and also represent the extraordinary gamut of her genius, from flippant gaiety and that Elizabethan lightness of touch which Milton banished from the sonnet, to tragedy and austere dignity. How wide the contrast between "I shall forget you presently, my dear," and "Euclid alone has looked on Beauty bare." Although not closely connected, the *Twenty Sonnets* are clearly a sequence in which a passionate, youthful spirit finds the evanescence of her loves balanced by the integrity of her art, a refuge from intolerable wistfulness.

In her latest volume Miss Millay is still unresigned to the reign of indiscriminate mortality, but love has come to play a less scintillating, more dependable role.

"This is my testament; that we are taken;
Our colours are as clouds before the wind;
Yet for a moment stood the foe forsaken,
Eyeing Love's favour to our helmet pinned;
Death is our master, — but he is shaken;
He rides victorious, — but his ranks are thinned."

TWENTY SONNETS

I

I shall forget you presently, my dear,
So make the most of this, your little day,
Your little month, your little half a year,
Ere I forget, or die, or move away,
And we are done forever; by and by
I shall forget you, as I said, but now,
If you entreat me with your loveliest lie
I will protest you with my favorite vow.
I would indeed that love were longer-lived,
And vows were not so brittle as they are,
But so it is, and nature has contrived
To struggle on without a break thus far, —
Whether or not we find what we are seeking
Is idle, biologically speaking.

II

Loving you less than life, a little less
Than bitter-sweet upon a broken wall
Or bush-wood smoke in autumn, I confess
I cannot swear I love you not at all.
For there is that about you in this light —
A yellow darkness, sinister of rain —
Which sturdily recalls my stubborn sight
To dwell on you, and dwell on you again.
And I am made aware of many a week
I shall consume, remembering in what way
Your brown hair grows about your brow and cheek,
And what divine absurdities you say:
Till all the world, and I, and surely you,
Will know I love you, whether or not I do.

III

Into the golden vessel of great song
Let us pour all our passion; breast to breast
Let other lovers lie, in love and rest;
Not we, — articulate, so, but with the tongue
Of all the world: the churning blood, the long
Shuddering quiet, the desperate hot palms pressed
Sharply together upon the escaping guest,
The common soul, unguarded, and grown strong.
Longing alone is singer to the lute;
Let still on nettles in the open sigh
The minstrel, that in slumber is as mute
As any man, and love be far and high,
That else forsakes the topmost branch, a fruit
Found on the ground by every passer-by.

IV

How healthily their feet upon the floor
Strike down ! These are no spirits, but a band
Of children, surely, leaping hand in hand
Into the air in groups of three and four,
Wearing their silken rags as if they wore
Leaves only and light grasses, or a strand
Of black elusive seaweed oozing sand,
And running hard as if along a shore.
I know how lost forever, and at length
How still these lovely tossing limbs shall lie,
And the bright laughter and the panting breath;
And yet, before such beauty and such strength,
Once more, as always when the dance is high,
I am rebuked that I believe in death.

V

Love is not blind. I see with single eye
Your ugliness and other women's grace.
I know the imperfection of your face, —
The eyes too wide apart, the brow too high
For beauty. Learned from earliest youth am I
In loveliness, and cannot so erase
Its letters from my mind, that I may trace
You faultless, I must love until I die.
More subtle is the sovereignty of love:
So am I caught that when I say, "Not fair,"
'Tis but as if I said, "Not here — not there —
Not risen — not writing letters." Well I know
What is this beauty men are babbling of;
I wonder only why they prize it so.

VI

Not with libations, but with shouts and laughter
We drenched the altars of Love's sacred grove,
Shaking to earth green fruits, impatient after
The launching of the coloured moths of Love.
Love's proper myrtle and his mother's zone
We bound about our irreligious brows,
And fettered him with garlands of our own,
And spread a banquet in his frugal house.
Not yet the god has spoken; but I fear
Though we should break our bodies in his flame,
And pour our blood upon his altar, here
Henceforward is a grove without a name,
A pasture to the shaggy goats of Pan,
Whence flee forever a woman and a man.

VII

The light comes back with Columbine; she brings
A touch of this, a little touch of that,
Coloured confetti, and a favour hat,
Patches, and powder, dolls that work by strings
And moons that work by switches, all the things
That please a sick man's fancy, and a flat
Spry convalescent kiss, and a small pat
Upon the pillow, — paper offerings.
The light goes out with her; the shadows sprawl.
Where she has left her fragrance like a shawl
I lie alone and pluck the counterpane,
Or on a dizzy elbow rise and hark —
And down like dominoes along the dark
Her little silly laughter spills again !

VIII

Oh, think not I am faithful to a vow !
Faithless am I save to love's self alone.
Were you not lovely I would leave you now:
After the feet of beauty fly my own.
Were you not still my hunger's rarest food,
And water ever to my wildest thirst,
I would desert you — think not but I would ! —
And seek another as I sought you first.
But you are mobile as the veering air,
And all your charms more changeful than the tide,
Wherefore to be inconstant is no care:
I have but to continue at your side.
So wanton, light and false, my love, are you,
I am most faithless when I most am true.

IX

I do but ask that you be always fair
That I forever may continue kind;
Knowing me what I am, you should not dare
To lapse from beauty ever, nor seek to bind
My alterable mood with lesser cords;
Weeping and such soft matters must invite
To further vagrancy; and bitter words
Chafe soon to irremediable flight,
Wherefore I pray you if you love me dearly,
Less dear to hold me than your own bright charms,
Whence it may fall that until death, or nearly,
I shall not move to struggle from your arms:
Fade if you must, — I would but bid you be
Like the sweet year, doing all things graciously.

X

I pray you if you love me, bear my joy
A little while, or let me weep your tears;
I, too, have seen the quavering Fate destroy
Your destiny's bright spinning — the dull sheares
Meeting not neatly, chewing at the thread, —
Nor can you well be less aware how fine,
How staunch as wire, and how unwarranted
Endures the golden fortune that is mine.
I pray you for this day at least, my dear,
Fare by my side, that journey in the sun;
Else must I turn me from the blossoming year
And walk in grief the way that you have gone.
Let us go forth together to the spring:
Love must be this, if it be anything.

XI

I think I should have loved you presently,
And given in earnest words I flung in jest;
And lifted honest eyes for you to see,
And caught your hand against my cheek and breast;
And all my pretty follies flung aside
That won you to me, and beneath your gaze,
Naked of reticence and shorn of pride,
Spread like a chart my little wicked ways.
I, that had been to you, had you remained,
But one more waking from a recurrent dream,
Cherish no less the certain stakes I gained,
And walk your memory's halls, austere, supreme,
A ghost in marble of a girl you knew
Who would have loved you in a day or two.

XII

When I too long have looked upon your face,
Wherein for me a brightness unobscured
Save by the mists of brightness has its place,
And terrible beauty not to be endured,
I turn away reluctant from your light,
And stand irresolute, a mind undone,
A silly, dazzled thing deprived of a sight
From having looked too long upon the sun.
Then is my daily life a narrow room
In which a little while, uncertainly,
Surrounded by impenetrable gloom,
Among familiar things grown strange to me
Making my way, I pause, and feel, and hark,
Till I become accustomed to the dark.

XIII

And you as well must die, belovèd dust,
And all your beauty stand you in no stead;
This flawless, vital hand, this perfect head,
This body of flame and steel, before the gust
Of Death, or under his autumnal frost,
Shall be as any leaf, be no less dead
Than the first leaf that fell, — this wonder fled,
Altered, estranged, disintegrated, lost.
Nor shall my love avail you in your hour.
In spite of all my love, you will arise
Upon that day and wander down the air
Obscurely as the unattended flower,
It mattering not how beautiful you were,
Or how belovèd above all else that dies.

XIV

I only know that every hour with you
Is torture to me, and that I would be
From your two pignant lovelinesses free !
Rainbows, green fire, white diamonds, the fierce blue
Of shimmering ice-bergs, or to be shot through
With lightning or a sword incessantly —
Such things have beauty, doubtless; but to me
Mist, shadow, silence — these are lovely, too.
There is no shelter in you anywhere;
Rhythmic intolerable, your burning rays
Trample upon me, withering my breath;
I will be gone, and rid of you, I swear:
To stand upon the peaks of Love always
Proves but that part of Love whose name is Death.

XV

Still will I harvest beauty where it grows:
In coloured fungus and the spotted fog
Surprised on foods forgotten; in ditch and bog
Filmed brilliant with irregular rainbows
Of rust and oil, where half a city throws
Its empty tins; and in some spongy log
Whence headlong leaps the oozy emerald frog. . .
And a black pupil in the green scum shows.
Her the inhabiter of divers places
Surmising at all doors, I push them all.
Oh, you that fearful of a creaking hinge
Turn back forevermore with craven faces,
I tell you Beauty bears an ultrafringe
Ungessed of you upon her gossamer shawl!

XVI

Sometimes when I am wearied suddenly
Of all the things that are the outward you,
And my gaze wanders ere your tale is through
To webs of my own weaving, or I see
Abstractedly your hands about your knee
And wonder why I love you as I do,
Then I recall, "Yet *Sorrow* thus he drew;"
Then I consider, "*Pride* thus painted he."
Oh, friend, forget not, when you fain would note
In me a beauty that was never mine,
How first you knew me in a book I wrote,
How first you loved me for a written line:
So are we bound till broken is the throat
Of Song, and Art no more leads out the Nine.

XVII

Euclid alone has looked on Beauty bare.
Let all who prate of Beauty hold their peace,
And lay them prone upon the earth and cease
To ponder on themselves, the while they stare
At nothing, intricately drawn nowhere
In shapes of shifting lineage; let geese
Gabble and hiss, but heroes seek release
From dusty bondage into luminous air.
O blinding hour, O holy, terrible day,
When first the shaft into his vision shone
Of light anatomized ! Euclid alone
Has looked on Beauty bare. Fortunate they
Who, though once only and then but far away,
Have heard her massive sandal set on stone.

XVIII

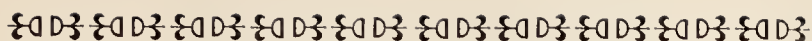
Only until this cigarette is ended,
A little moment at the end of all,
While on the floor the quiet ashes fall,
And in the firelight to a lance extended,
Bizarrely with the jazzing music blended,
The broken shadow dances on the wall,
I will permit my memory to recall
The vision of you, by all my dreams attended.
And then adieu, — farewell ! — the dream is done.
Yours is a face of which I can forget
The colour and the features, every one,
The words not ever, and the smiles not yet;
But in your day this moment is the sun
Upon a hill, after the sun has set.

XIX

I shall go back again to the bleak shore
And build a little shanty on the sand,
In such a way that the extremest band
Of brittle seaweed will escape my door
But by a yard or two; and nevermore
Shall I return to take you by the hand;
I shall be gone to what I understand,
And happier than I ever was before.
The love that stood a moment in your eyes,
The words that lay a moment on your tongue,
Are one with all that in a moment dies,
A little under-said and over-sung.
But I shall find the sullen rocks and skies
Unchanged from what they were when I was young.

XX

Cherish you then the hope I shall forget
At length, my lord, Pieria? — put away
For your so passing sake, this mouth of clay,
These mortal bones against my body set,
For all the puny fever and frail sweat
Of human love, — renounce for these, I say,
The Singing Mountain's memory, and betray
The silent lyre that hangs upon me yet?
Ah, but indeed, some day shall you awake,
Rather, from dreams of me, that at your side
So many nights, a lover and a bride,
But stern in my soul's chastity, have lain,
To walk the world forever for my sake,
And in each chamber find me gone again!



XX—THOMAS S. JONES, JR.

[1882-]

LIVING today in the heart of New York City, a few hundred feet from the subway and Columbia University, is the author of a great religious poetry. His hair is nearly white but his face is peculiarly unlined and his eyes are a sparkling blue. Indifferent to almost every aspect of an apartment-house culture, he simply ignores it, strolling about Morningside Heights with his close friends, aloof, amused and humble. His essential mind moves in a forgotten world where "the old gods listened, lonely in the dew."

This poet, Thomas S. Jones, Jr., of vigorous Welsh lineage, was born in Boonville, New York. He was educated at private schools and at Cornell University where he came under the influence of Dr. Hiram Corson, the distinguished teacher and Browning scholar. There also he developed a profound and lasting interest in the sonnet form, first through Rossetti's *House of Life* and later through Mrs. Browning, Keats and Wordsworth. After graduating he was for several years on the dramatic staff of the *New York Times* and with the Reuter Cable Service. *The Rose-Jar* appeared in 1906, a little volume of fragile, wistful poems, verging on over-sweetness; often they suggest the clear simplicity of Housman, without the undertone of disillusioned bitterness in *The Shropshire Lad*. It is noteworthy that *The Rose-Jar* begins and ends with a sonnet, and contains several others, all written in perfect Petrarchan form, with the octet and sestet completely separated. *The Voice in the Silence* (1911) sounded a deeper note and one that was more distinctly devotional.

Yet it was not until November 1918, the last month of the war, that Jones struck his true vein, when he wrote

Sanctuary, a group of four religious sonnets, followed by fifty more during the next year. Finally, in 1920-21, Jones began his poetic history of the early church in Britain with *Sonnets of the Cross* which was continued a few years later in *Sonnets of the Saints*, and *Six Sonnets* dealing with pre-Christian, Druidic times. From all of these the poet has selected thirty-three sonnets to form a compact sequence, here published for the first time under the title of *Christ in Britain*.

What Wordsworth failed to do in the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* Jones has accomplished for the early centuries of the English church, turning a series of faded customs, personalities, events, into a glowing music, Celtic in atmosphere, magical in method, mystical in inspiration. Each single line is a perfectly wrought jewel, yet each single poem seems to harbor on eternity. As Dr. Henry Wells has said: "The Sonnet as written by the Italians was primarily an intellectual form, psychological and philosophical. The Sonnet as written by Mr. Jones is at times narratory, always pictorial and always intensely suggestive. He has invariably contrived to place an image, inobvious and vast, within a small and precise compass." Of such poetry one either catches the flavor or he does not. Here analytic comment is more worthless than usual. It is only necessary to remember that Druids once dwelt in British forests, that the Romans came, and then, the Saints.

*All silent now—the gods return no more,
Yet buried deep beneath the drift of time
The ruined roadway still endures and waits.*

CHRIST IN BRITAIN

I

NEW GRANGE

The golden hill where long-forgotten kings
Keep lonely watch upon their feasting-floor
Is silent now, — the Dagda's harp no more
Makes sun and moon move to its murmurous strings;
And never in the leafy star-led Springs
Will Caer and Aengus haunt the river shore,
For deep beneath an ogham-carven door
Dust dulls the dew-white wonder of their wings.

Yet one may linger loving the lost dream —
The magic of the heart that cannot die,
Although the Rood destroy the quicken rods;
To him, through earth and air and hollow stream
Wild music winds, as two swans wheeling cry
Above the cromlech of the vanished gods.

II

MAY UPON ICTIS

Far out at sea beneath rich Tyrian sails
The merchants watch a ghostly mountain spread
Terrific dawn-wings fired with cloudy red,
And cease their barter over purple bales;
Wild headland flames to headland; in the dales
Hushed warriors wait, for no torqued chief may tread
That dim white forest where the vanished dead
Gather like birds before the spume-drenched gales.

Around the mount barbaric trumpets cry;
Then Ictis thunders through her altar-stone,
Long cloven by a god's mysterious rune;
And pinnaced between the earth and sky
Her savage prophet stands, majestic, lone,
Helm'd with the sun and girdled with the moon.

III

A DRUID TOWN

A sunless maze of tangled lanes enfold
The magic dwellings of the forest race,
Whose hidden shapes are flames that leave no trace
At mid-moon when the Druid's dream is told;
The shadows of enchanted orchards hold
Red thatch of wings and woad-stained doors that face
The wandering stars, and guard the secret place
Where faery women thread their warps with gold.

The dragon knight shall lose his strength of hand
Nor ever raise his long leaf-shapen shield,
If he but follow where the white deer roam;
And never will the mariner reach land
When harps ring seaward as the dawn fires yield
The golden caer upon the ninth wave's foam.

IV

CAER SIDI

Alone, unarmed, the Dragon King must go
To seek the Cauldron by a magic shore,
For gleaming harness wrought of wizard ore
Is powerless against an unknown foe;
The lonely Caer, walled with the flaming Bow,
Lifts dark enchanted horns where wild seas roar,
And in the moon's white path a mystic door
Moves to strange music only Merlins know.

Within, vast shapes and awful shadows start,
While deathless gods who hold the wave-worn stairs
Do ghostly battle with a hero's soul;
But at his eagle cry their thonged shields part,
And from the cloven fire the Chieftain bears
High in his mighty grasp the star-rimmed Bowl.

V

ARTHUR

Behind storm-fretted bastions gray and bare
Flame-crested warriors of Cunedda's line
Feast in a golden ring,—their targes shine
Along the wall and clang to gusts of air;
And in the shadow, torches blown aflame
Reveal a chief, half human, half divine,
With brooding head, starred by the Dragon Sign,
Hung motionless in some undreamed despair.

But when he starts, three torques of twisted gold
Writhe on his breast, for voices all men fear
Wail forth the battle-doom dead kings have borne;
And as the mead-hall fills with sudden cold,
Above the wind-tossed sea his heart can hear
The strange gods calling through their mystic horn.

VI

TALIESIN

On lonely shores where dreams are drifted sand
He follows to the end a star's bright course,
A ghostly hunter without hound or horse,
The warrior bard, last of the Druid band;
But still his wizard harp rings in his hand
Beside the Stream of Sorrow's hidden source,
Still from a breaking heart his wild songs force
Their way into the god's mysterious land.

Dauntless he sings, and sees the drear wood turn
To golden orchards by the river bed
Where healing waters of the rainbow run;
And past the valley near great peaks that burn
With beaconing fire, the hero-bard is led
Up toward the Dragon City of the Sun.

VII

YNISWITRIN

Dim watered vale whose clear streams seek the sea,
At gray of dawn strange gods walked in the wood
Before Saint Joseph's wattled chapel stood
Woven with green wands from some Druid tree;
The fragrance of a lost simplicity
Clings to the tomb of the white brotherhood
That wandered through wild lands, yet found it good
To linger here apart with Calvary.

The feet of frost have touched you, now you wear
Autumn's rich ruined splendor and soft haze —
The memory of immemorial fires;
But as you dream alone, the sea-winds bear
A whispered promise from wide starry ways
Of new songs that shall fill those fallen choirs.

VIII

THE HOLY THORN

Long centuries past by lonely barrows grew
The faery hawthorn boughs of haunted green,
Beneath whose shade the Danaan gods unseen
Awoke slain heroes dark with battle-dew;
Their gilded shields of apple-wood and yew
In time's deep tumulus have lost their sheen,
Yet where these blossom-laden branches lean
The faith of vanished ages blooms anew.

One ancient miracle enduring still,
Though earth's old magic seems a myth outworn,
Has hallowed Avalon's enchanted hill;
For when men hymn the Son of God reborn,
Although December woods are bare and chill,
At wintry Christ-tide flowers the Holy Thorn.

IX

THE FOREST

In lonely thickets where the wood is deep
The sickles of thin gold weave to and fro,
Among the boughs of ghostly mistletoe
Beneath a night of whispering leaves they reap;
And with the waning moon the Druids creep
From knoll and hollow noiseless as the snow,
Their white bulls pace about the pool and low
Through mists of magic while walled cities sleep.

But when the wakened forest moves and gleams,
They vanish at the singing of a bird
And Ninian leaves his hidden resting-place;
Still with the wingèd angel of his dreams
Down empty groves he leads his savage herd,
The light of dawn on his uplifted face.

X

OLD MAGIC

As light swings wide the mighty Eastern door,
He comes with crozier and a silver bell
To bless the green wood where the Druids dwell
Alone with colored winds and starry lore;
They hear his feet along the leafy floor
And tremble when he nears their wizard-well,
For shadows of a golden citadel
No longer veil its deeps with faery ore.

All forest wisdom must give way to him:
Never at evening will the speckled wren
Foretell the ages from a dewy thorn,
Nor gray priests watch until the moon grows dim
The milk-white hounds slip through a silent glen
And vanish up the flaming slopes of morn.

XI

THE BLIND NUN

A nun green-girdled in a forest tower
Gave praise that prayer had made her blind eyes new,
And to her fern-wreathed lattice swiftly drew
When thrushes called the dawn's cool silver hour;
She saw beyond pale apple-boughs in flower
A dying moon and pastures pearled with dew,
Then, where the hill-tops turned to lilac-blue,
A red sun rising, fierce with golden power.

Yet, lest the glowing world become too dear,
White Dara prayed that darkness veil her sight
And closed the casement with an ivory rod;
Like shadows faded mountain, wood, and mere,
But fairer than the sun or moon's strange light
Across her blindness shone the Face of God.

XII

SAINT BRIDE'S EVE

At twilight on a lonely cattle trail,
Led by the star that was the shepherds' guide,
With sunset in her brown-gold hair moves Bride,
Snowy her kirtle, crocus-white her veil;
Far down the windy pastures of the Gael
A herald-cry drifts from the mountain side —
The salmon leap within the ice-blue tide,
The flowers of Mary quicken in the dale.

Then while the forest harps ring with her name,
Fairer than Brigid crowned with earth's old fire
She walks among the lambs of dewy fleece;
And with a lovelier light than Spring's green flame
Across dim ferny thatch and wattled byre
Her shadow falls, and wild hearts know its peace.

XIII

DUNDAGIL

On lonely headlands at a magic cry,
The vanished fortress of a mountain king
Shadows the cliff, and battle trumpets ring
A clear call to adventure, stern and high;
Upon a starry quest armed knights ride by
Where, fairer than the wizard fires of Spring,
The angels of the Grail rise wing on wing
In a wild dawn against the eastern sky.

Then turrets sway; the ragged bastion fails,
A wind-blown mist along the darkening air;
The plumed host sleep on Snowdon's cloudy scar;
And from a haunted tower the raven wails
Of shining hope and deeds that were so fair
Beneath the splendor of the Dragon Star.

XIV

SAINT ILLTYD

When fierce *Caer Leon*'s wars were trumpeted
And northern kings in flaming chariots rolled
Against the host, a warrior battle-bold
Left camp and court that Christ's poor folk be fed;
Beside the sea where haunted pastures spread,
The forest knight, whose glaves were thonged with gold,
Yoked to wild bullocks broke the grassy mould,
A cloud of gulls about his helmless head.

And while he toiled for men in that strange land,
Nor dreamed of gain or glory by his plough,
Beyond the meadows moved a burning sail—
Slowly the mystic barque drew near the strand,
And borne on wings above the glistening prow
Fair as the star of morning shone the Grail.

XV

ARAN MOR

Foam-girdled shores a lost enchantment keep
And swift translucent lonelineses hide
The swans that through the purple shallows glide
By pearl-white sands where saint and Druid sleep;
Here Enda, gathering his island sheep,
Beheld the moon with silver magic guide
Dark waves, and found beyond the yearning tide
The Mystery that moves upon the deep.

Still in the sunrise secret splendors burn,
For though his cell with weeds be overspread,
A host of angels seek the wind-swept height;
And as of old, when ocean meadows turn
To flaming mist, their quiet pinions shed
On cross and ruined cairn a rose of light.

XVI

THE BLESSING OF COLUMCILLE

Torqued warriors turned their galley's crimson prow
To hear a white monk hymn the Holy Three
In Derry's orchard vale beside the sea,
The light of peace upon his shining brow;
And angels, watching near the forest plough,
Saw Colum's blessing change the withered tree,
Cursed by the demon riders from the shee,
And bring the wild sweet apples to the bough.

Beneath his voice, clear as a ringing bell,
Dark kerns laid down their spear-shafts, then were still,
And in each bitter heart the sweet fruit grew;
Dim oak woods, wakened from the Druid spell,
Shone white with wings; and on the sunset hill
The old gods listened, lonely in the dew.

XVII

SAINT BRENDAN

In simple days before the gods were old
A bishop left the warring forest bands,
And on the beach there grew beneath his hands
A silver coracle with oars of gold;
It bore him where the sea and sky enfold
Long dewy marges of the moon-white lands,
A mist of stars around those dreaming strands
Lifted a moment that he might behold.

Then swifter than the wind a shaft of fire
Fled from the quivering bow-strings of his heart,
To find the ever-hidden entrance there;
And now in answer to a saint's desire
The island waits, held by that flaming dart,
Upon the burnished edges of the air.

XVIII

THE BATTLE OF THE BOOK

Beneath bronze chariot wheels the torn earth steamed
A mighty death-mist, Druids called in vain
Their forest gods, across the battle plain
The savage stallions of Diarmuid screamed;
For on Columba's men a brightness streamed
Keener than whistling sword-flame or fierce rain
Of whirling brands, and high above the slain
Invisible with light mailed Michael gleamed.

The armies bowed like grass on windy weirs
Before the unknown foeman's burning shield,—
Then from the silence rose hoarse triumph cries;
And brass walls wavered under rattling spears,
As wild Tyr-Conall's prince swept down the field
Led by the lone white warrior of the skies.

XIX

SAINT ORAN

Saint Oran told them while the West grew dim
About lone islands whither he had gone,
And how he saw the orchards of the dawn
Lying beyond the green earth's burnished rim;
Upon that golden wall walked Cherubim
Whose shadows were a snow-light on the lawn,
And ere their gentle wonder was withdrawn
One pitying held a starry branch toward him.

The cowed monks listened, and at vesper bell
They left him in a quiet place to dream
By garden-ways where grasses drift like fleece;
But when they reached the central ivied cell,
Across the altar moved the crimson gleam
Of that wild fruit of flame whose taste is peace.

XX

SAINT COLUMBA

The murmuring tide foams slowly up the sands,
Behind a veil of gold lost Ireland lies,
And with the sunset in his yearning eyes
Alone on Colum-kil Columba stands;
He frees the white bird from his tender hands,
Beyond a changing violet sea it flies,
A streak of mist against the burnished skies
It vanishes in far green Western lands.

The tides still whisper through the waning light,
Wings still find rest along that wave-worn place,
But he will climb the cold gray rocks no more;
And yet ye know that from a fairer height
He watches across deeps of star-filled space
The well-loved outline of his Irish shore.

XXI

CLONARD

By lost Clonard the river meads still hold
Forgotten dreams, white memories pure as dew,
Of fragrant days when scholars wandered through
The marshy grass, and hearts had not grown old;
Beneath her purple hills a saint once told
A starry tale, a story strange and new
Brought from the dawn-lands — and all Eiré drew
Around his moat to hear the words of gold.

There stands no cross, or tower, or ancient wall
Mellow with simple peace men used to know,
And from the fields no courtly town has sprung:
Only along green banks the blackbirds call,
Just as they did a thousand years ago
In morning meadows when the world was young.

XXII

THE BURNING OF BAMBOROUGH

With thundering wheels the golden war-wains run
As wild fire leaps upon the gabled place,
And shining warriors cry the White Christ's grace
Against the harm the heathen gods have done;
Hate's burning trumpets shriek the triumph won,
The bastions flame, and with uplifted mace
On rides the leader of the raven race,
Swart, giant-thewed, the Aesir's shaggy son.

But Aidan prays within his lowly cell,
And paler than the moon upon a mere
A winding wood-smoke folds the rock from sight;
And while they hunt the vanished citadel
Through many a misted mile, the wolf-men hear
Far ringing harps on Bamborough's starry height.

XXIII

CÆDMON

From feast and song the simple cowherd crept:
Again the harp had passed him on its way
And he was mute — now in the fragrant hay
Alone with dumb and patient beasts he wept;
The oxen, ass, and timid sheep all kept
Winter's harsh cold from reaching where he lay,
Their humid breath rose like an incense gray
As on the Eve when Christ among them slept.

But ere the stars were folded in rose flame
A Voice like a great wind rang clear and high,
"Sing, Cædmon, of Creation's radiant birth!"
And when the first flushed light of morning came
A hymn to God upsoared into the sky,
And a new speech was given to the earth.

XXIV

SAINT HILDA

In hollow pastures misted with the spume
Of waves that crash against the minster wall
Hild counseled kings or won, as Christ's own thrall,
A savage thane, crowned with a heron's plume;
And when faint candles lit the winter gloom,
The cowherd's harp rang through her rush-strewn hall,
While white nuns listening heard how angels fall
And wove the tale to deck a hero's tomb.

Her lost world fades into the centuries' night,
With all the wonder of old simple things —
Great visions seen and starry hopes set free;
Yet still men seek her where the Rood shines bright
Against the ancient dust, and Cædmon sings
High in her garth above the lonely sea.

XXV

THE FOREST SAINT

When wolves were conquered by a hermit's bell,
Upon the forest's dim untrodden lane
White oxen, yoked before a gleaming wain,
Brought queens to pray beside his holy well;
And once a deer leaped down the tangled dell,
While woodward of the wind a royal thane
Plunged on a great black war-horse and drew rein
To slay God's hart within the wattled cell.

But brighter than his shield of beaten brass,
Or Lammas moon, or set of autumn sun,
He saw the lifted Host through veils of light;
And in the little hut of reedy grass
Chad raised the soul Love's miracle had won
And houseled Odin's warrior Christ's armed knight.

XXVI

OWINI'S VISION

A thane beneath a snowy hawthorn hedge,
When dove-gray hills were golden with the sky,
Laid down his scythe to hear a starry cry
Fall like a dream wind-blown from ledge to ledge,
And, from the chapel on the forest edge,
A saint's deep chant soar sunward clear and high,
As when the lines of gleaming heron fly
To lonely pools beyond the purpled sedge.

Then white as dew upon the morning sheaves
The reaper saw a cloud of angels pass
Through sunlit birches by the water-springs,
And watched them wait among the dappled leaves
To fold Chad's soul, more sweet than summer grass,
Within the silver circle of their wings.

XXVII

THE BIRDS OF WHITBY

Sea-mosses hide the massive architrave,
Beneath the ruined porch a sheep-bell rings,
And where Hild's gleemen sang to silver strings
Now sound the wailing harps of wind and wave;
But though dreams pass, the restless gulls that brave
The bitter gales still seek the peace which clings
To hallowed walls, and furl their foam-white wings
Along the reaches of the silent nave.

And throistles at the greening of the year
In their wild singing weave the chants of old
That saints have limned with many a colored bar, —
The very song the angels paused to hear
When Cædmon knelt within the cattle-fold
Between the moonrise and the morning star.

XXVIII

JOHN SCOTUS ERIGENA

To wolfish knights with hound and hooded hawk
He speaks in vain of Lord Christ's fair demesne,
For like a bow-shot where the larches lean
Leap hart and hind their baying pack will stalk;
With thoughts upon the hunt, they hear him talk
Of Light, whose shapes are varied as the sheen
On sunshot plumes — blue purpling into green —
That peacocks spread along his garden walk.

Down leafy coverts sweet with briar and brake
The shaggy hunters watch the dappled herds
And heed the summons of a silver horn,
Unwitting that the clarion voice will wake
The Western Isles, that through his ringing words
The last great echoes of far Greece are borne.

XXIX

THE STAG OF CHEDDAR

The king rode close behind the royal stag
In helm bright yellow as an eagle's eye,
And swore the antlered crown that swept the sky
Along a winding woodland path should drag;
Through beechen glade and bogs of reed and flag
On thundering hooves the forest lord rushed by,
Then yawned a gulf, and with a mighty cry
The hart fell crashing down the mist-wreathed crag.

"Now Dunstan succor me!" the hunter cried.
Upreared his roan until the foaming mane
Streamed back across the gilded saddle-horn;
And Edmund vowed upon that gray hillside
The saint whose power had checked his bridle-rein
Should rule the Abbey of the Holy Thorn.

XXX

QUEEN MARGARET'S MISSAL

The king stood bowed within the cloister crypt
Above the scribe who blent the green and blue
With lines of scarlet color burning through,
As though the quill in Malcolm's heart were dipped;
And like the letters curved to wings flame-tipped,
His thoughts about the pearl of women drew,
Made lovelier by the radiant Life that grew
Fair as a rose along the glowing script.

The hands that wrought the missal for the queen
Have dropped to dust, and over heath and hill
The royal hunter never more will ride;
But through the ages, bright with golden sheen,
Upon the leaves of painted parchment still
Love and the light-illumined Word abide.

XXXI

THE BRINDLED HARE

By grange and castle when the fields were cool
Saint Anselm rode and marked how swans afloat
Upon the liliated waters of the moat
Reposed in love untaught by rod or rule;
And while he paused beside the reedy pool,
A brindled hare with blood upon her coat
Took refuge from the pack's deep baying note
Beneath the scarlet housings of his mule.

But when the savage hunters sought their prey,
At his command their hounds refused to spring,
Held back like wolves within a forest snare;
And with bent bows, they watched him ride away,
Tender as Christ Who heals each broken thing,
Bearing against his breast the wounded hare.

XXXII

SAINT HUGH

On mountain slopes, whose rocky summits glow
Tier upon tier about one crimson spire,
Hugh sought the vision of his soul's desire —
The white immensity no mind can know;
Above the height where storm-whirled eagles go
He heard the lonely stars' deep thundered choir,
And saw vast lights and shapes of living fire
Around the altars of eternal snow.

Then with his dream into the vales he came
To shape the heavy stones through love's strange power,
Bearing upon his back the workman's hod;
Till, lifted by his spirit's burning flame,
The minster soared with pinnacle and tower
Sunward to meet the Mystery of God.

XXXIII

A ROMAN ROAD

A road shines through the forest of the years
Where on swift winds the gods come charioted
By sun and moon, until the earth is red
With Mars' mailed host and Woden's bleeding spears;
But down the burning wood of lonely fears
A fair White God goes by with noiseless tread,
The Thorns of Fire are stars that wreath His Head,
And in His Heart is pity for men's tears.

Then flaming Michael holds the haunted tor,
And from the wildwood steals the thin sweet chime
Of evening bells at monastery gates;
All silent now — the gods return no more,
Yet buried deep beneath the drift of time
The ruined roadway still endures and waits.

XXI—CONRAD AIKEN

[1889-]

SINCE 1914 Aiken has published nine volumes of poetry which have shown a constant advance both in substance and technique, but aside from occasional and often grudging praises, his work has been little noticed and less appreciated. A partial exception to this general neglect is the criticism of Louis Untermeyer who sums up his views of the new era in American poetry in the latest edition of the Encyclopædia Britannica. "Among the more resonant singers, Conrad Aiken fashioned a curiously crepuscular music, which later, in *Punch: The Immortal Liar* (1921) and *Priapus and the Pool* (1925), developed into a dark lyricism of extraordinary plangency."

Of old New England stock on both sides, Aiken was born in Savannah, Georgia, where his father practised medicine. At the age of eleven, after the sudden death of his parents, he went to live with relatives in New Bedford, Massachusetts; attended boarding school for several years; and at length went through Harvard, graduating with the class of 1912. He had been a frequent contributor to the *Harvard Advocate* and the *Harvard Monthly*, at one time an editor of the *Advocate*, class poet, and a close friend of T. S. Eliot who wrote some of his most characteristic verse while still an undergraduate. In June 1912 Aiken married, travelled in Europe for a year, and then settled down to the writing of poetry in Cambridge. After six years in Boston and on Cape Cod, he lived in England from 1922 to 1926, finished his novel, *Blue Voyage*, and again returned to reside in Cambridge.

At the outset Aiken proved himself a facile enough versifier, although far too suggestible, falling successively under the influence of Masfield, Masters, John Gould

Fletcher, and T. S. Eliot. He learned most from the Imagists and was soon developing his own shifting, broken rhythms to express different aspects of the chaotic sea of consciousness. In five long "symphonies," *The Charnel Rose*, *The Jig of Forslin*, *The House of Dust*, *Senlin*, and *The Pilgrimage of Festus*, he elaborated such fundamental themes as nympholepsy, vicarious experience, and personal identity into a loosely connected philosophy, epitomizing the disillusioned, disintegrated modern soul. In *The Jig of Forslin* (1916) and *The House of Dust* (1920) especially Aiken very definitely anticipated *The Waste Land* (1922), which is often considered the representative poem of this generation.

Punch: The Immortal Liar, is a racy allegory of man the boaster, the puppet, the eternal paranoiac. "One of the most significant books of the poetry renaissance" it was called by Amy Lowell who went on to say, "No one understands the manipulation of metrical verse better than Mr. Aiken. The metre chosen for the epilogue is a perfect example of musical and dramatic taste." This technical mastery is further exhibited in a series of brilliant lyrics, *Priapus and the Pool*, and in such powerful blank verse poems as "Tetelestai" and "King Borborigmi."

The following nine sonnets were written as a group in the winter of 1926-27, but have never before been printed together and in fact there are no sonnets in any of Aiken's published volumes. It is too early to evaluate them definitely but they seem to be in the great tradition, with something of Shakespeare's power and Donne's complexity. And it is appropriate that this book should end as it began, on the theme of poisoned love.

SONNETS

I

Broad on the sunburnt hill the bright moon comes,
And cuts with silver horn the hurrying cloud,
And the cold Pole Star, in the dusk, resumes
His last night's light, which light alone could shroud.
And legion other stars, that torch pursuing,
Take each their stations in the deepening night,
Lifting pale tapers for the Watch, renewing
Their glorious foreheads in the infinite.
Never before had night so many eyes.
Never was darkness so divinely thronged
As now — my love ! bright star ! — when you arise,
Giving me back that night which I had wronged.
Now with your voice sings all the immortal host,
This god of myriad stars whom I thought lost.

II

What music's devious voice can say, beguiling
The flattered spirit, your voice can richlier say,
Moving the happy creature to such smiling
As the young sun brings flowers at break of day.
Nor can the southwest wind, which turns green boughs,
Or sings in watery reeds, outvie your voice,
No, though the whole wide world of birds he rouse,
And boughs and birds together all rejoice.
Not water's self, shy singer among stones,
Vowelling softly of his secret love,
Can murmur to green roots such undertones,
Nor with low laughter have such power to move.
No rival — none. There is no help for us.
Be it confessed: I am idolatrous.

III

Think, when a starry night of bitter frost
Is ended, and the small pale winter sun
Shines on the garden trellis, ice-embossed,
And the stiff frozen flower-stalks, every one,
And turns their fine embroideries of ice
Into a loosening silver, skein by skein,
Warming cold sticks and stones, till, in a trice,
The garden sighs, and smiles, and breathes again:
And further think how the poor frozen snail
Creeps out with trembling horn to feel that heat,
And thaws the snowy mildew from his mail,
Stretching with all his length from his retreat:
Will he not praise, with his whole heart, the sun ?
Then think at last I too am such an one.

IV

My love, I have betrayed you seventy times
In this brief period since our stars were met:
Against your ghost announced unnumbered crimes,
And many times its image overset;
Forgot you, worshipped others, flung a flower
To meaner beauty, proved an infidel;
Showing my heart not loyal beyond an hour,
Betraying Paradise, and invoking Hell.
Alas ! what chain of thought can thinking bind ?
It is in thought alone that I have faltered,
It is my fugitive and quicksilver mind,
By every chance and change too lightly altered.
Can I absolve, from this all-staining sin,
The angelic love who sits, ashamed, within ?

V

Imprimis: I forgot all day your face,
Eyes, eyebrows, gentle mouth, and cheek, all faded;
Nor could I, in the mind's dark forest, trace
The haunted path whereby that dream evaded.
Secundus: I forgot all night your laughter,
In vain evoked it by strong charms of thought:
Gone, like a cry that leaves no image after,
Phoenix of sound which no hand ever caught.
Tertius: my wanton mind and heart, together,
Forgetting you, you absent, have delighted
For no more cause than bright or stormy weather,
Singing for joy; in truth, I am benighted.
Yet, when I home once more from breach of faith,
Love there awaits me with a joy like death.

VI

What lunacy is this, that night-long tries,
With seven or seventy or ten thousand words,
To compass God in heaven, the loved one's eyes?
Alas! were the whole language turned to birds,
And I Prince Prospero to set them free,
Though I should hide all heaven with beating wings,
Still the essential would escape, still be
Unspoken, dumb, like all essential things.
Love, let me be the beginning world, and grow
To time from Timelessness, and out of Time
Create magnificent Chaos, and there sow
The immortal stars, and teach those stars to rhyme —
Even so, alas, I could in no sense move
From the begin-all-end-all phrase, "I love."

VII

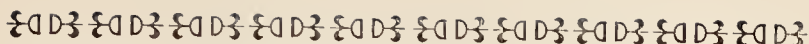
My love, my love, take back that word, unsay
The heavy sentence that confronts us now:
Check Time: and let today be yesterday,
The fallen flower again upon its bough.
Say you deceived yourself — say you mistook —
Say you were angry, though you were not so —
And I'll believe you as the boy his book,
Taking your no for yes, your yes for no.
Christ! Is it possible this shadow weighs
So grievously upon you? And must I
Find comfort in this secondary praise, —
Outshone, by him, in your appraising eye?
Were love magnanimous, then I might speak
Nobly of this and him; but I am weak.

VIII

Here's Nature: it's a spider in a flower,
Poison in honey, darkness in delight,
Disastrous doom that tolls delirium's hour,
The arrow of mischief in the brightest light.
What's love, with doubt's slow venom mixed, unless
It be a most ecstatic hue of hate?
Joy, in the heart, grows dumb with bitterness;
The serpent coils bright rings by Eden gate.
Nor can the eye, or cunning brain, remove
Loathing from love, or honor from mistrust;
Horror with beauty wrangles in this love,
The angel wrestles with the fiend of lust.
Not here, not here, will Eros rest his head,
Nor sleep, and smile in sleep, till we be dead.

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Here's daffodil — here's tulip — here's the leaf
Of new-sprung hawthorn in the bird-loud wood;
And sunlight trumpeting at our coil of grief,
While busy murder hammers at his Rood.
You are not all I thought you might be; I
Am not the god my rival was; and so,
We stare, we tremble, hopeless to deny
The chaos that we know, and know we know.
Here is no tragedy, if it were not
That more I love you as you worse appear;
Here is no poison, could you be forgot,
And that grim shadow which you hold so dear.
But since you loved him, love, he lives in you;
And since I hate him, I must hate you too.



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